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the synonymy of *Rachis*. Owing to its radular resemblances, it was made a sub-genus of *Ena*. "The Achatinoid aspect" of its shell was considered by Gude (3) a sufficient case for retaining it as a separate genus. The study of the anatomy has shown that the resemblance to *Ena* is only general and not sufficient to warrant its being made a sub-genus of *Ena*. The central tooth of *Rachisellus* differing only slightly in size from the laterals, and having a trapezoid basal plate, the presence of an ophallus, besides a flagellum and a penial appendage in the reproductive system, and the relative lengths of the 'uterus' and the 'vagina' are important features distinguishing *Rachisellus* from *Ena*.

In conclusion I have to express my best thanks to Dr. Bairi Prashad for some of the references, to Dr. U. S. Rao for the verification of the species and references and to Dr. Steenberg of Copenhagen for sending me some of his papers.

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## Kerala Theatre

K. R. PISHAROTI, Esq., M.A.

That little tract of land in the south-west corner of India which lies snug and secure in the fond embrace of the mighty arms of the *Malaya Parvata* on the one side and the *Pascina Pāridhi* on the other, is a unique little area, probably the most self-centred, self-contained in the whole range of this vast peninsula. The creation and the colonisation of this area are, according to local tradition, ascribed to that great Brahmin warrior and inveterate hater of monarchy, Sri Parasurāma. This tradition, when subjected to a historical scrutiny, can mean only that it was this intrepid warrior who discovered Kerala to the Aryans and introduced into it the Aryan culture and civilisation; and quite consistent with this, our local traditions make him the sole organiser of our *grāmams*,<sup>1</sup> the primeval founder of our temples, the great systematiser of our rituals, *Vedic* and *Tāntric* and *Māntric*, and the earliest architect of our social, religious, and political *Dharma*. The beginnings of the Aryanisation of our culture may go back to a hoary antiquity. True, indeed, we cannot trace its first beginnings and subsequent developments from that remote, dim, shadowy past, through the vast sweep of centuries, but available records and traditions show that, since the dawn of the Christian Era, our culture and civilisation never underwent any convulsions violent enough to bring about any complete metamorphosis. Thanks to her isolated situation and the abundant security that a benign nature conferred upon her, she was never a prey to the ruthless foreign invader, who in the words of the late lamented Prof. Sir William Ridgeway, 'wherever they went changed the aspects of the lands they conquered and into which they introduced their own laws and customs and manners!' Such is the case elsewhere in India, and especially is it so in Northern India. This does not mean, however, that Kerala was enjoying an isolated seclusion. Even at the earliest period of which we have any record—and this is pre-Christian in point of time—our fore-fathers were carrying on a very brisk trade with various countries far and near, and the modern Cranganore figures under various names as the greatest emporium of trade in the whole east, in whose spacious harbour could be seen the ships of the Phoenicians, the Egyptians, the Greeks and the Romans from the remote west, and the Malays, the Chinese and the Papuans from the Far East. But all these came not as invaders, but as peaceful traders, and consequently, while everywhere else foreign influence led to culture suppression and culture transformation, in Kerala this led only to culture stratification and culture assimilation. Naturally therefore that vigorous seedling of Aryan culture that was successfully transplanted into the indigenous culture-soil continued to flourish there in all its vigour and vitality and to live and grow into a beautiful tree with brilliant foliage and yielding

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<sup>1</sup> A *grāmam* means a social and religious unit. It is not to be confused with a village. The whole Kerala is divided into sixty-four *grāmams*.

sweet fruits. Kerala can, therefore, boast for her culture a continuity that is scarcely less interesting than her antiquity. And when it is remembered that this culture was constantly brought into contact with a number of distinct and different cultures, one can naturally expect to find here cultural assimilation and cultural superimposition, resulting in a new synthesis of conflicting civilisations. These three facts—antiquity, continuity and culture-synthesis—lead to the study of this culture more than a passing interest and importance. Add to this also the existence of a large number of 'genuine primitive survivals' in almost every aspect of our social, religious and political life and one may without exaggeration assert that our cultural antiquities open up a field of inquiry at once interesting and important not merely to a particular section of scientific students but to all alike—to the student of archaeology and anthropology, to the student of art and architecture, to the student of religion and philosophy.

One aspect in which this wide and varied culture has found expression is the subject of the present study—I mean the stage. The Kerala Stage has made its own valuable contribution to the sum of Indian culture. The orthodox section of this stage which has a religious atmosphere attached to it and is, therefore, beyond the gaze of profane eyes, plays no inconsiderable role in helping the reconstruction of the ancient Sanskrit stage,—the active traditions of which have died out elsewhere in India—and in assisting the elucidation of one of the outstanding problems of Sanskrit Literature of the day—I mean the well-known Bhasa problem which has been generally misunderstood on account of the dearth of information regarding our stage practice. No less important is the vernacular section in which beginnings may be found revealed of the art of dramatic representation, beginnings probably primitive in character, but none the less interesting for that. Besides, the development of the stage raised the local spoken dialect to the status of a literary language. And the two together present to us a complete picture of our national tastes and cultural temperaments. It would be proper to mention here that the term stage or theatre is used in a very wide sense as embracing within it all kinds of spectacular entertainments which are characterised by the appearance in public of one or more persons in costume for the purpose of entertaining the audience and which have some literature connected with it.

## II. INTRODUCTION

(a) *General Features.*—In the sense in which the term stage or theatre is here understood, its most outstanding characteristic seems to be the wealth and variety of its forms. The aim of all spectacular, or more correctly, dramatic entertainments is mainly two-fold: to impart instruction and to afford pleasure. The theatre is possibly the surest and certainly the most obvious way of educating the masses. It is again a very powerful instrument of social reform and, no doubt, in olden days it discharged this function as satisfactorily as the press and the platform do in modern days. Besides, in those times the propagation and popularisation of religion constituted one of the main functions of the theatre. And lastly it provides inexhaustible source of delight. According then

as the object of the dramatist differs, so does the nature of the play. Didactic plays are generally careful of their story, and this, so far as we now can say, has been true of all Sanskrit dramas. Those intended to reform society teem with wit and humour. Religious plays are either allegorical or clothed in an atmosphere of super naturalism. Proper acting with due regard to naturalness of representation, and dress, music and scenic effect can be met with only in such dramatic works as have pleasure for their main aim. This variety of aims accounts to no little extent for the variety in our spectacular entertainments. We have thus entertainments which have predominantly an educative value, a religious value or an æsthetic value. Thus the Sanskrit section of our theatre has served most effectively to popularise the Hindu religion and philosophy, and with it the language in which they have found expression. It also developed a keen sense of literary appreciation and produced a number of literary works and commentaries which, both in quality and quantity occupy a high position in Sanskrit Letters. Similarly, the vernacular section has by its contribution developed a spoken dialect into a literary language. And it is not too much to say that our stage has got its eloquent appeal to make to the students of literature, both Sanskrit and Malayalam. And furthermore, it can claim an unbroken continuity through the vast sweep of at least a thousand years. On account then of these facts, our theatre becomes an important source of study to all those who aspire to a knowledge of our ancient culture.

Another feature of the Kerala theatre, probably the most outstanding one, which to a great extent distinguishes it from the Tamil, the Telugu, the Kannada or the English stage, as now known, is the prominence it assigns to actual acting and dancing. Such terms as *Nāṭaka* *Nāṭya* lend weight and authoritativeness to this practice of our stage; for these are suggestive enough of the place that has to be assigned to acting in the presentation of a Sanskrit drama, which is as it were the well-spring of all our indigenous types of vernacular entertainments. The venerable sage Bharata may also be mentioned in this connection in view of the fact that he devotes a large section of his work to the scientific exposition of the art of acting. It is not an exaggeration to say that the numerous dancing postures described by him can find living examples in the wonderfully artistic poses constantly exhibited even to-day by Kerala actors. In view of this, in according to acting and dancing their proper pre-eminence, our theatre is but keeping truer and nearer to the ideals of the ancient Hindu stage tradition.

The third equally important and prominent feature of our theatre is the use, almost exclusive use, of the gesture language of a highly codified and systematised character. This is so prominent a feature that in some varieties this, and not any spoken language, is the only means of expression. The codified gestures which are used as a means of conveying ideas in the various types of entertainments may well be classified under the three heads of: (1) *Natural Gestures*, such as are unconsciously produced and utilised, when the speaker is moved by great emotion or passion; under this head may be included such gestures as those used for denoting *come, go, eat, etc.*, (2) *Imitative Gestures* which reproduce the shape or some striking peculiarity of the thing or person or being;

such for instance as those referring to lion, elephant, tiger, fish, tortoise, etc. (3) *Gestures* resulting from the amplification for secular purposes of the orthodox types of *Tāntric* and *Māntric* symbols such as those used for *Ārādhana*, *Abhaya*, *Dāna*, *Ārādhana*, etc. The original ritualistic symbols must have been amplified for the use of the *Cākyārs* in staging Sanskrit Dramas, and thence it must have been extended to the secular varieties. These three varieties which consist of primitive instinctive gesticulations and natural and symbolic representations lend themselves to all sorts of permutations and combinations, and these, when combined and systematised, constitute the code of gesture language. (See Plate I: Some typical *Mudrās*).

It may here be mentioned that even the *Māntric* and *Tāntric* symbols must originally have been elaborated from the simple natural and imitative gestures. It is, therefore, not far fetched to assume that the *Tāntric* and *Māntric* symbols must have served as the basis of the gesture language of the stage, later developed by the addition of the imitative and instinctive gestures. And so far at least as the Sanskrit stage is concerned, this gesture language must have been introduced with a view to popularising the sacred language also. It appears, besides, to have served another practical purpose. An orthodox code requires that Brahmins should not use the profane vernacular during the course of their daily rituals; at the same time it is practically impossible for them to avoid communication with the *Ambalavāsīs*.<sup>1</sup> Sanskrit could not serve this purpose and the *Nampūtiris* (Kerala Brahmins) might have developed a simple code of gesture-language.

Whatever might have been the motive, this device served as an excellent method for helping the illiterate crowd to understand the language of the play and appreciate it better. That this must have been the original motive is also clear from the fact that the code of gestures used by the *Cākyārs* is far simpler than that used by the actors of the *Kathakālī*. For, in the former the actor has to confine himself to the space between the elbows of his outspread arms, while for the latter the whole space between his extended reach is at his disposal. The larger space available makes the *Kathakālī* gestures more graceful and understandable probably so designed to make the code appeal even to the larger crowd of illiterate audiences. The use of gesture-language as a means of communication appears to be very old, older than even *Kūttu*. In its beginnings, the code must have been very simple and natural and hence easily understandable, and it later became codified and stereotyped as the actors' language. This is a subject that deserves to be studied in detail.

These then, namely, the abundance of variety, the prominence given to acting and the use of a codified gesture language constitute the peculiar features of our stage, both Sanskrit and Vernacular.

(b) *Classification*.—Almost all the varieties of our spectacular entertainments are characterised by a religious atmosphere, in some cases intrinsic and in others extrinsic, which may be made the basis of

<sup>1</sup> The *Ambalavāsīs* constitute the intermediate caste between the *Nampūtiris* and the *Nairs*, and their main profession is temple work. The *Cākyārs* are *Ambalavāsīs*.

classification : thus we have the purely religious, the semi-religious and the secular types. Under the religious head may be mentioned (i) *Bhagavati pāṭṭu*, (ii) *Tiyyāṭṭu*, (iii) *Pāna*, (iv) *Pāṭṭu*, (v) *Kaṇiyār Kālī* and (vi) *Mutiyēttu*. Under the purely secular variety may be mentioned (i) *Elāmuttipurappāṭu*, (ii) *Tullāl*, (iii) *Korattiyāṭṭam*, (iv) *Mohiniyāṭṭam*, (v) *Kayyukottikkālī*, (vi) *Pāṭhakam* and (vii) *Kāthakālī*. Under the religious head may be placed (i) *Sanghakkālī*, (ii) *Kūttu* and (iii) *Kṛṣṇāṭṭam*.

Such a classification holds good so far as the language also is concerned : the first two varieties are purely in the local vernacular, while the last, I mean the semi-religious variety, is mainly Sanskrit. They are also capable of a classification from the prominence of one or other of the elements of acting, dancing and music. In *Kāthakālī* and *Kūttu* proper acting occupies the most important place; in *Korattiyāṭṭam* and *Mohiniyāṭṭam* dancing takes the place of importance, while in *Kayyukottikkālī* we have practically only vocal music and a very simple kind of dance.

(c) *Conditions of Staging*.—Restrictions imposed upon the actors or acting are very few indeed, except in the case of *Kūttu* and *Kṛṣṇāṭṭam*, and all of them dispense with the necessity for an elaborate stage. Any open space with a small temporary shed used to serve as a stage, and a coloured piece of cloth to serve as a curtain constitute the essential stage accessories. Lighting effect is never attended to, and, as a general rule, there will be but a single big brass lamp, about three feet high with wicks placed on either side. It is also not allowed to spice the representation with any sort of instrumental music. All the music available is what is produced on *Asura Vāḍyas* and what is supplied by the vocal music of the actors or the singers themselves. The absolutely primitive nature of the accompaniments and the accessories is a sure indication of the necessarily great share of work that the actors themselves have to discharge to win popular appreciation and approval; and it is no small credit to their superb acting that many of these varieties do cater even today to the recreation and pleasure not merely of the rustic crowd but also of the enlightened.

### III. RELIGIOUS VARIETY

The six varieties of *Bhagavati Pāṭṭu*, *Tiyyāṭṭu*, *Pāna*, *Pāṭṭu*, *Kaṇiyār Kālī*, and *Mutiyēttu* have been characterised as religious, for the simple reason that they are invariably found celebrated in Bhagavati shrines in honour of the goddess, sometimes as an annual festival conducted by the temple itself and at other times as a votive offering by the pious villagers in the temple or in their homes. These are intended to glorify the Bhagavati cult and deal exclusively with the glorification and thus the popularisation of that cult which, by the way, is one of the theistic Hindu cults most popular in our parts. They have again for their main theme the destruction of *Dārīka* by *Kālī* or the Victory of *Pārvali* over *Śiva*. The language of these songs is exclusively in the local vernacular, and the actors or the dancers are generally from the lower orders of the caste Hindus. These and the fact that the lower types of *Tāntric* and *Māntric* rituals are also found associated with some Bhagavati shrines tempt one to think that in these spectacular representations

may be found the sole surviving relics of the old type of the worship of sylvan Gods and Goddesses current amongst the indigenous native population which by culture-contact and culture-stratification were purified, ennobled and admitted into the Aryan fold.

### (i) Bhagavati Pāṭṭu

*Bhagavati Pāṭṭu* is generally found conducted either in temples or in the houses of the Kerala Brahmins, called *Nampūtiris*. The figure of Bhagavati with heads and arms and body is drawn on the floor with coloured flour and then *Jivapratigṛha* is done. Sitting around it and playing upon some of the musical instruments the troupe of people, called *Kurups*, sing the songs glorifying the goddess. The songs continue and the story reaches the climax, when the *Komaram*<sup>1</sup> attached to the temple becomes possessed and begins his weird dance carrying a jingling *cilambu* in one arm and a pointed sword in the other. He explains in human accents the ideas of the Goddess, as it were, and points out how the Goddess—he uses the first person—is great and good and powerful, how she is pleased with the devotion that the people have shown but how they have failed in this one or that other respect, how she is well pleased with them with the conduct of the *Pāṭṭu* and how she will always protect them. As the process of talking goes on, the songs continue and the musical instruments go on sounding. In due course the *Komaram* quiets down and the whole function comes to a close.

### (ii) Tiyyāṭṭu

*Tiyyāṭṭu* is similar to the above in all respects except for this difference: that when the songs reach the fifth stage the *Komaram* in his possessed fury jumps into the fire and executes some weird stepping dance. While the former type of dance can be either a family or a votive offering, this latter is always a village or a communal offering. The most important point in this so far as we are now concerned is the presence of music, to the accompaniment of which there is a sort of dancing by a character who poses as a representative of a divine being for the edification of a large audience in an open place.

### (iii) Pāna

*Pāna* is another variety of similar dancing, and though not much different from the preceding, it is technically held to be different. Two types are prevalent: it may be an individual votive offering, in which case there is only one *Komaram* taking part in it—the *Komaram* associated with the temple in which the performance is conducted. It might also be a communal or a village function; in which case all the *Komarams* of all the Bhagavati shrines in the neighbourhood must take part in it. Dressed in their usual weird habit, they conduct in unison a very queer kind of dance to the accompaniment of the instrumental music of the

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<sup>1</sup> *Komaram*, also known as *Veliccapāṭu*, is the earthly representative of the Goddess. He is selected from amongst the Nairs generally.



type called *Asuravādya*.<sup>1</sup> As a third sub-variety of the same, may be mentioned another similar dance in front of a Bhagavati shrine conducted by *Katupottans*, a class of people included amongst the lower orders of Nairs, who become possessed under the influence of alcoholic drink. This *Paiśācika* variety, be it noted, is run as a village offering for the purpose of getting rain, when it is inordinately delayed—an evidently powerful clue as regards the Dravidian origin of these and other similar types of entertainments conducted in the name of Bhagavati.

#### (iv) *Pāṭṭu*

Not far removed from these in essentials, much less in spirit, is the variety, known as *Pāṭṭu*. It is purely a law', or domestic function celebrated by rich families as a beneficent complement to such a ritual as marriage. The purely religious aspect of this consists in the invocation of the Goddess *Pārvati* on a properly, I mean tactically, made seat, i.e. a *Piṭha* surrounded by the various items of *Manjalā-Caraṇa*; this is then followed by the singing of songs by a particular set of *Ambalavasi* women, called *Puṣpini*, in a sing-song tone accompanied by the sounding of a metal plate with a table knife. At the same time there stands in front of the goddess invoked a couple of ladies dressed in their religious ceremonial dress, and as the song proceeds, they become possessed and then begin a circular dance and convey the commands of the Goddess. The function begins early in the morning and with necessary intervals runs on the whole day and night. Here again we have the glorification of the Goddess, but it differs from the other kinds in that here it is a woman who becomes possessed.

#### (v) *Kaniyār Kaṭi*

*Kaniyār Kaṭi* is another variety of interesting performance current in the northern parts of Cochin, conducted in Bhagavati shrines. When the performance comes on, there is erected a decorated *pandal* in the temple adorned with flags and festoons. In the centre a big lighted lamp is placed, round which the players dance to set music, both instrumental and vocal, the dance being supposed to be an imitation of the dance of *Mahākālī* and *Mahākāla*. The performance generally continues for three days, the portion for each day being fixed with reference to the music. On the first day we have the *Āṇḍikāṭṭu*; the second day we have the *Valluvon Pāṭṭu* and on the third, the *Malama Pāṭṭu*. *Āṇḍikāṭṭu* means acting in praise of *Āṇḍavar*, i.e., Subramanya, the issue of Siva. *Valluvon Pāṭṭu* is in praise of *Valluvon* who is held to have been a saint and philosopher, and *Malama Pāṭṭu* was so called, because probably a mountain song was sung. All these songs are highly devotional in sentiment, though here and there may be found references to social incidents. The main performance is done in the temporary hall and each day has its fixed songs. After the songs and dances are over, some farcical element is introduced in which the various castes are

<sup>1</sup> *Asuravādya* is the name given to the instruments such as *Cenda*, *Kombu*, *Kulal*, etc. and the music produced by them is loud and is everything that is the opposite of gentle.

represented and ridiculed for their various vices. This portion of the representation is called by the name of *Poraiṭṭu*, and its main theme is humour and social satire, each player appearing in costume suitable to the character. On the final day after the songs are over, all the players together worship the Goddess enshrined in the temple and make their exit. This is again a queer kind of performance in which music, vocal and instrumental, and dancing and acting play an equally important part: but as in the varieties considered, here also the main and central point of interest is the Bhagavati, enshrined in the temple. Naturally therefore this also deals with the glorification of the Bhagavati cult. This is, however, like the *Pāna*, a group or communal celebration, where all males, children and adults, can take part, and is celebrated both as a votive offering and as a temple function.

### (vi) *Muṭiyettu*

Unlike the varieties hitherto described stands *Muṭiyettu*, which is the most important of the representations associated with the Bhagavati Cult. This is the only variety in which two characters appear in costume, the one representing *Kāḷi* and the other *Dārika*. The term itself is significant in that it means the *Yeṭṭal* (wearing) of the *Muṭi* (the crown) of *Kāḷi*. A critical study of these various religious varieties tempts one to associate the origins of dramatic representation with religious music accompanied by spontaneous gestures and then music with dancing. Since the figure drawn combines in itself both pictorial and sculptorial representation herein may also be seen the beginnings of painting and sculpture. This then forms an important variety which deserves to be more closely studied.

As before this again is celebrated in Bhagavati temples and is conducted by a subsection of Ambalavasis, called Kurups, who combine in themselves the arts of music and painting, acting and dancing. They arrive early in the afternoon, and in a conspicuous place in the temple front prepare a relief-painting of the Goddess *Kāḷi* in her most terrific aspect. Simultaneously with the evening rites in the temple, they begin to entertain the people with their music, vocal and instrumental. When the evening rites and ceremonies of the temple are over, the idol of the goddess is taken out in procession and after a fixed number of circum-ambulations in the precincts of the temple it is kept in a prominent place. The first item in the representation is a meeting between Siva and Nārada, when the latter informs him that the earth is groaning under the oppression of *Dārika* and it closes with Siva's promise of his destruction by *Kāḷi*. In the meanwhile the two characters who impersonate *Kāḷi* and *Dārika* and are dressed in costume are ready to appear and at the appointed hour *Dārika* comes out and challenges *Kāḷi*. The challenge is accepted, and *Kāḷi* rushes in. There is no fixed stage—the whole temple area forms the stage and the characters walk about in a moving fight. Here is a long, tedious process of acting a battle between the two, and ultimately the goddess wins killing *Dārika*. The last act is an imposing scene and fills the audience with terror, occurring as it does at day-break. The chief item of the murder scene is

when *Kāṭi* plunges her hands into the very bowels of *Dārika* followed by the drinking of and besmearing the body with blood, and ultimately she adorns herself with his intestines.<sup>1</sup>

The success of the acting depends, as it necessarily must, on the superior practical skill of the actors in the matter of acting, all the more so since there is no other serious accompaniment to relieve the tedium. This representation is looked upon as a very orthodox and religious act, and so it is beyond the pale of popular criticism from the point of view of aesthetics, and one must necessarily concede that this acting is of a superior order. The costume of the characters agrees in many respects with the costume of the characters in *Kathakali*, and without committing oneself to rash statements, one may suggest that the latter may have been derived from the model of the former. Further, I incline to find in this religious representation one of the few surviving relics of the indigenous type of spectacular entertainments, and this more than anything else has tended to popularise the Bhagavati cult in Kerala.

### (vii) Conclusion

The purely religious variety may be better termed the *Bhagavati Cult* variety, because in all these the glorification of the Bhagavathi is the main object. It has also been mentioned that in many of these varieties, the *Komaram* plays a very important part. He is a personage connected with almost all important Bhagavati shrines in our parts. His other name is *Veliccapāṭu*, and he is looked upon as the earthly representative of the Goddess and when he is 'possessed', he is generally accorded all the honours given to the deity herself. When we remember how *Komarams* used to be selected, as they are even at the present day, we may truly see in the same, a process more or less similar to what has been described by Sheppard in his Greek Tragedy: 'Since the worshipper is regarded as affecting a God by his prayer, he assumes the character of the God to influence him and he conceives the God assuming the character of the worshipper in order to be more easily influenced'. The *Komaram* identifies himself with the Goddess and thus becomes 'in fact by enthusiasm literally filled with the Goddess'. Herein is found in short a very crude kind of Goddess impersonation on the part of the worshipper. Again, as in Greece, the performance is always out of doors, the actors, musicians and the spectators all being in open air. The performance is conducted by day in some varieties, while many of them are held during night, sometimes lit up by the moonlight but always by lamps and torches. Further, the main centre of interest is not so much the representation, as the Bhagavati shrine or the figure drawn of the Goddess in relief-painting in some prominent place. Furthermore, there is absolutely no effort made at any scenic effect, while the place and time are denoted by mere words or proper gestures. Thus it will be seen that Bhagavati cult dances, music and acting are entirely a religious function and a religious act, with the requisite religious solemnity pervading the whole performance, but with this difference, namely that

<sup>1</sup> There is kept within the costume a pouch containing some red liquid and a long unseemly chain-like thing to represent the intestines.

the audience is bent upon enjoying it. It is also interesting to point out that the songs, the dances and rude pantomime acting—all these are hung on to a tragic story, the destruction of *Dārīka* by *Kālī*. There are some interesting parallels with the Grecian representation during pan-Athenæic festivals. Thus there is the simple act of worship, broadening into a drama. There is also the process of the humanisation of Gods. And last, but not least, comes the mythological nature of the subject which hangs on to a tragic story and which has special reference to national cults and cult-acts. An intensive study of these from a comparative point of view is sure to yield some useful results which may throw some more light on the problem of the origin of theatrical representations.

In *Kālī's* destruction of *Dārīka* one is tempted to find not a nature or vegetation myth. I am inclined to associate it with Hero-worship—worshipping the hero or heroine who rescued the place from the oppression of a wicked demon. When, however, it is remembered that *Kālī* fights her battle with sword and shield and *Dārīka* with sticks, it is tempting enough to search for in this the pre-historic clash between the earlier wood age and the later iron age. But this topic does not come within the province of the present subject, and I do not wish to pursue it further, except to suggest that a detailed, systematic study of the same may also help to elucidate the pre-historic culture-values of the Malayalis.

#### IV. SECULAR VARIETY

The importance of this variety cannot be over-estimated for its contributive value to the enrichment of Malayalam and Sanskrit Literatures. The development and popularisation of the varied types of secular entertainment have definitely contributed to the growth of Malayalam Literature and to its elevation to the status of a literary language. The more important of the types under this head are (i) *Elāmutti-purappāṭu*, (ii) *Tullal*, (iii) *Korattiyāṭṭam*, (iv) *Mohiniyāṭṭam*, (v) *Kayyukottikkālī*, (vi) *Pāṭhakam* and (vii) *Kathakālī*, which represent between them all varieties of singing, dancing, and acting with the appearance in public of characters in costume. As in the case of the purely religious type there is no fixed stage, but unlike it there is always a curtain used; again unlike it, the centre of interest is the actual representation in front and not the temple or the figure of a Goddess (*vide* section III-viii). In the case of one at least of these varieties, the method of announcing the performance is singularly effective. The instrumental musician, the *Cenṭakkāran* sounds in the evening his instrument in a peculiar manner called *Kelīkottu*. This sound is generally heard within a radius of not less than two miles. Equally effective from the practical point of view is the method of advertisement. When a troupe of players come to a village they hold a free performance, called *Sevakālī*, in the village temple. This serves the double function of paying homage to the village deity and acting as a sort of advertisement, it being a common measure of encouragement given by the authorities of the temple to supply free light for the performance. A more effective way of announcing a troupe of players cannot be conceived. It deserves to be pointed out even

at the very outset that all these performances, including those already mentioned and hereafter to be mentioned, are free to all, i.e., there is no ticket system, and this is something in which our stage stands entirely apart from all other modern stages as far as we know. For the benefit of the village the richer people of the *grāmam* one after another invite the troupe to play in their houses, the expenses being paid by the inviter. A voluntary subscription is sometimes sought from landlords and other big men of the village at the spot in the course of the performance, and this is known as *Polī*, i.e., voluntary gift. Here, in this act, the rich villager discharges his part of the *noblesse-oblige* in the matter of intellectual recreation, as much as he does in the matter of supplying free education to the more unfortunate children of the village.

### (i) *Elāmutti-Purappātu*

Not the least important and perhaps the most interesting from a historical point of view is what is known as *Elāmutti-Purappātu*. This is a constant source of entertainment conducted in the houses of *Ambalanāsis* generally on the occasion of certain religious domestic ceremonies. This is one condition as regards the place of acting; the only other condition attached to it is that only *Ambalanāsis* and *Nānpūliris* are allowed to take part in the performance. The nature of the performance is as follows:—A number of people, and generally each of them is a good actor in some particular character, sit round a lighted lamp after dinner. Some sort of musical instrument is sounded and one from amongst the party sings a song which is a riddle and asks another member to answer the riddle. If the person questioned fails to answer, the questioner asks him to act the part of any character with or without proper costume. Immediately he begins to act what he has been ordered. When this is over, the procedure is repeated and the part that the player is called upon to act varies from that of a drunkard to that of the love-sick Rāvaṇa pleading to Sita, care being always taken to see that each person is called upon to play only that character which he can act almost to perfection. This is a very simple form of domestic entertainment more of the nature of a farce and must no doubt have been a very interesting source of recreation.<sup>1</sup>

The name of the variety is interesting. No woman has a place in the actual conduct of the performance, though any one of the players may well impersonate any woman character; yet the term literally means *the appearance of seven maids, or hags*, to be more literal. One is almost tempted to remember in this connection the *Sapta Kanyākas* associated with Śrīvite shrines on the East coast and the "Seven Vestal Virgins of Rome". This latter part becomes historically interesting, when it is realised that the Romans had one of their colonies at the Muziris of old i.e., the modern Cranganore. But the absence of a female actor stands in the way of tracing any connection between the two. Apparently one is forced to suggest a new interpretation of the term—to take the term as a debased form of "*Elāmūrti*"—seven characters, probably suggesting the original number of players

<sup>1</sup> This is more or less similar to one form of the English game of 'Forfeits'.

taking part, or the impersonations to be staged. In the light of the information now available nothing further can be said about this.

## (ii) *Tullal*

No less interesting than *Elamutti-purappālū*, but more important from a literary point of view, is the variety called *Tullal*, one of the most popular sources of recreation amongst us. This is the result of a theatrical quarrel which has enriched our vernacular literature to a very great extent. Once while a *Cākyār* was acting a drama, the *Nambiar* was playing on the musical instrument of *Miḷavu* (See Plate II-i) and he worked it wrongly. The *Cākyār* got angry and administered a severe reproof to him in the course of his dramatic exposition. This public censure was too much for the young *Nambiar*, and so, as soon as the performance was over, he sat devising a new mode of performance, and, working at it the whole night, produced something new in form and spirit, though it was based on a harmonious combination of *Prabandham Kūttu* and *Pāṭhakam*, which we shall refer to later on. He also devised a new costume which was more attractive than the costume of the *Cākyār*, but at the same time more ludicrous than serious. The next day, when the *Cākyār* began his *Kūttu*, his erstwhile assistant began his new performance with the required instrumental music. This attracted the whole of the *Cākyār*'s audience. Such was the origin of *Tullal*; and it retains even to-day the popularity that it had on the first day of its staging. This gifted actor-poet was the famous Kunjan Nambiar and he has made a very substantial contribution to the Malayalam Literature.

The scenic and musical equipment required in this variety of entertainment is comparatively little. The actor dresses in a costume that is peculiar, being distinct from the *Cākyār*'s dress and the dress of the characters in *āṭhakaḷi*. He wears a frilled skirt round his waist, with a couple of *bandha* round his arms. (See Plate II-ii) His face is painted and he wears a head-dress. There is, indeed, some difference in the costume for the different varieties of *Tullal*. The character is helped by a musician who leads the song and works on a *Maṭṭhaḷam* and another man keeps time to the song with a cymbal. The musician sings the songs which are then repeated by the actor to the accompaniment of acting and gestures and facial expression, while the instrumental music is kept up. In other words, the actor has to sing, act, gesticulate and at the same time dance—which involves some skill on the part of the actor. In this, then, may be found a harmonious combination of *Prabandham kūttu* and *Pāṭhakam*, while the use of the vernacular language, the absence of restrictions regarding place and persons acting, the presence of a character in costume, the accompaniment of instrumental and vocal music, these have made it more popular than *Kūttu* and more attractive than *Pāṭhakam*.

In addition, the gifted author of this innovation had 'a remarkable insight into the rationale of metrical effect and he therefore adopted various metres to match the variety of moods and emotions so that the spontaneity of impulse is at every turn exhibited by a suitable change in the measure, cadence and movement of the verse, and thus he leads

the way not merely in point of originality but in point of excellence in this branch of our literature.' Consequently, as he was the first, so is he the best of our *Tullal* poets.

As has already been mentioned, there are three varieties of *Tullal*, and they are known as *Ottan Tullal*, *Parayan Tullal* and *Sitankan Tullal*. They differ more in the measure and cadence of language than in costume, except in the *Sitankan* where the actor adorns himself with ornaments made out of the tender leaves of the coconut tree. As has been suggested, the performances are generally in the form of ballads, sung in character. The Puranic stories supply an inexhaustible theme, but for the most part 'being fused with the colour and temper of the poet's mind' they appear as new creations. There are no curtains used and whenever the actor needs some rest, he has devised an easy method of taking it: he simply turns his back upon the audience. There is of course only one actor, and he appears generally with painted face and adorned with a head-dress which has some faint attempts at ornamentation generally in the form of a serpent hood. The actor has not merely to sing under the lead given by the singer, but he also acts, his whole body being set in motion: while his legs beat time to the song and music, he dances and his eyes and face express the sense of the songs and his arms represent the same in the code of the gesture language. Since the time of its origin, this has been a very popular type of entertainment.

### (iii) *Korattiyāṭṭam*

Another equally popular kind of dance representation is *Korattiyāṭṭam* or Gipsy Dance. The origin of this is not very well known and I am inclined to think that it is an importation, though it has been very well assimilated to our conditions of life. Two characters appear on the scene in the garb of ladies, impersonating the wives of Śiva and Viṣṇu, accompanied by a musician who sings the songs to the accompaniment of instrumental music while the two characters act the songs in the language of the gesture code with the requisite facial expressions and dances (see Plate III-i). These two, the consorts of Viṣṇu and Śiva, carry on an interesting dialogue regarding the respective merits and demerits of Viṣṇu and Śiva, each trying to prove that her Consort is superior to the other's. They carry on the conversation by acting and dancing and by gesture language which is made clear by the musician who sings the songs, while an assistant keeps time on his cymbal.

### (iv) *Mohiniyāṭṭam*

*Mohiniyāṭṭam*, or the Siren dance, was once a very popular source of entertainment which has now practically died out. Here a lady appears in the garb of a temptress and entertains the audience with dance and music. The idea is based on the legendary story of Viṣṇu's appearing in the garb of Mohini to tempt Śiva. It is a very elegant type of recreation: but unfortunately because the women who thus appeared in public generally had low morals, it came to have some opprobrium attached to it; it is no longer a current entertainment.

(v) *Kayyukoṭṭika*

The only other variety where women appear in public to entertain people is in what is known as *Kayyukoṭṭika*. Here a number of grown up ladies dance round in a circle (see Plate III-ii), singing the songs in chorus under their leader and keeping time with their hands; this resembles the Japi dance of the Mundas in Chota Nagpur but for the presence of the male who works the instrumental music.<sup>1</sup> The English educated ladies of the present day look down on this sort of entertainment and as a result this is also sharing the fate of *Mohiniyāttam*. But fortunately there has been a revival, in that this is now being used as one of the methods of physical education for girls. This is important also from the literary point of view in that it has tended to create some good literature in Malayalam. This type seems to be on the border line between dance and drama. It is interesting to point out here that this particular type of folk dance is very common during the local *Tiruvāṭira* festival which is supposed to be a commemoration of the destruction of Kāma, Cupid, at the hands of Śiva. Can this circular dance be taken as an instance of the use of dances to honour the dead, as was the case at Athens?<sup>2</sup>

(vi) *Pāthakam*

*Pāthakam* is bi-lingual variety, semi-Sanskrit, semi-Malayalam. In form and in nature, it is closely modelled on that variety of *Kūṭṭu* which is called *Prabandham Kūṭṭu*, and is probably connected with it in origin also. It consists in a dramatic exposition of any incident from the Puranas, the exposition being entirely in vernacular, while the verses for recital are in Sanskrit. It entirely dispenses with any kind of stage equipment, and there are no conventions to be satisfied, except probably the presence of a lighted lamp to be kept in front of the actor. On account of its simplicity of staging, it is one of the most popular types of entertainment current in our parts.

As the term itself suggests, the actor or expositor must be very learned and must besides possess a witty tongue and shrewd powers of observation; these, in addition to a melodious voice constitute an ideal actor. The costume of the actor is very simple, though quaint. He wears a head-dress which has some faint attempts at ornamentation, though in the absence of this, any coloured piece of cloth round his head will quite suffice. His chest is generally bare, adorned with sandal paste, necklaces and other ornaments. There is nothing to mark off the stage from the audience but a lighted lamp, and there is no curtain.

When everything is ready, the actor comes, stands facing the audience and performs *Maṅgala*, the verse being mixed Sanskrit and Malayalam, in a voice that is scarcely audible. This is then followed by a long prose passage in which he sets forth the purposes of such dramatic expositions, the main object being religious education of the easiest and simplest type. This opening verse and the subsequent prose passage compare very favourably with the *Nāṇḍi* and *Prarocana* of the

<sup>1</sup> This information is supplied by my esteemed colleague, Dr. Sen.

<sup>2</sup> Vide the Drama and Dramatic dances of non-European Races—Page 10.



Sanskrit stage. These over, he begins in the local vernacular and describes the situation where the story begins. Having thus well introduced the audience to the particular context, he recites the text which is in Sanskrit and proceeds to expound the same in vernacular with a wealth of illustrations, making adequate reference to the current social topics and not rarely to individuals. There is little of acting, but appropriate gestures are utilised to make the narration as vivid as possible. The expositor enjoys freedom of speech to a certain extent, though for fear of losing his patronage he never uses it to the same extent as the *Cākyār* does. It will be seen from what has been said that the main aim of this variety of spectacular entertainment is to impart education leavened with wit and humour.

This variety of entertainment is not far distinct from the variety of *Kūṭu* called *Prabandham Kūṭu*, for in both we have dramatic exposition and both serve more or less the same purpose. There are indeed some essential differences to which we shall refer later, and these would show that in *Pāṭhakam* we have *Prabandham Kūṭu* in miniature. The prominence given to the local vernacular and the freedom given to the performer, the place of acting and the actor are evidently innovations introduced in the direction of simplification with a view to making it more and more popular. And well was it for our land that such a type of recreation came into existence; for, as a result of this, some of the light of Sanskrit learning illumined the minds of even the masses. From another point of view also one ought to be grateful to the originators of *Pāṭhakam*, for this has led to the creation of a number of works in Sanskrit which are locally called *Prabandhams*. In number they are over 30, and in size they may easily fill a volume of about 300 pages, while in intrinsic merit they occupy a very high place in literature. Here is a definite measure of Kerala contribution to Sanskrit Literature, but unfortunately it is as yet unknown and unjudged. It is strange that not one of these has yet been published in Devanagari script. Again the need for an expository commentary to help the *Pāṭhakakkāraṇ* has also led to the creation of a school of literary criticism in Malabar and it also adds a definite contribution of its own to literary criticism. Thus it will be seen that *Pāṭhakam* and *Prabandham Kūṭu* supplied not merely noble recreation to all alike, both the literate and illiterate but also enriched the Sanskrit Literature both by original works and valuable commentaries.

### (vii) Kathakali

*Kathakali*, the most important variety of our popular stage, is not a very old type of entertainment and the circumstances of its origin are well-known. One of the well-known Zamorins of Calicut organised what has now come to be known as *Kṛṣṇaṭṭam*, modelled probably on Jayadeva's *Gita Govinda*—a variety of our stage which we shall consider later. This became very popular as soon as it was organized, and a neighbouring chief requested the Zamorin to send the troupe to his court. But because they were political rivals, the latter refused to send the troupe and sent word that there were none at the southern court who could appreciate the play. The chief retaliated by organising another popular variety of

entertainment, then called *Rāmanāṭṭam*, which subsequently has come to be called the well known *Kathakali* or *Ṭṭakatha*. Thus was organised by a chief of *Koṭṭārakkara Svarūpam*, a new type of entertainment which before long became the most important section of our local stage and which led to the creation of what constitutes the most substantial part of our vernacular literature. Thus this is one example of a political feud resulting in literary acquisition.

It is definitely known that *Kṛṣṇāṭṭam* was first staged on the date expressed in the *Kali* chronogram, '*Grāhyā stutirgathakali*', which, when worked out, gives the date, approximately 1657 A.D. This would show that *Kathakali* must have come into existence sometime later. We shall not be far from the truth, if we place this in the latter half of the 17th century. The same view is further borne out by the opening verse of *Ramanāṭṭam*, which runs as follows :

prāptānūdaghanasāstriyaḥ priyatamā śrīrohiṇījanmanah  
Vancikṣmāvaravīrakeralavibhoḥ rājuassrasussūnūḥ  
śiṣyaṇa pravaraṇa śaṅkarakaveḥ rāmāyaṇam varnyate  
kāruṇyena kathāguṇena kavayaḥ kurvantu tatkaruṇaḥ.

This verse suggests that the prince of *Koṭṭārakkara* who is the author of this work was a nephew of *Virakerala Varma* of *Travancore* and a disciple of *Śaṅkarakavi*. There appears to exist a prince of this name somewhere about 1665 A.D. It is therefore quite probable that this new variety must have been devised somewhere in the sixth decade of the 17th century.

It may not be uninteresting to point out briefly the nature of *Rāmanāṭṭam*. It describes the story of *Śrī Rāma*, beginning with *Dāśaratha's* *Putrakāmeṣṭi* sacrifice and ending with the siege of *Lanka*. The costume of the characters was more or less based upon what obtained in *Kṛṣṇāṭṭam* and masks were worn. The whole play was divided into seven Acts, to be staged in seven days or a *Seven Days Play*, as is technically called, and was first staged in front of the *Gaṇapati* shrine at *Koṭṭārakkara*, the shrine of the family patron deity. Coming to the work itself, the language is a mixture of *Sanskrit* and *Malayalam*, the former predominating in the verses and the latter, in the *Paśāms*—a peculiar language feature which obtains also in the later *Kathakali*. Critics are of opinion that the work does not possess a high order of literary merit; but however that may be, students of *Malayalam Literature* cannot afford to forget the services rendered by the prince of *Koṭṭārakkara*: for he originated the new type of spectacular entertainment which in its turn contributed a good deal to the literary status of *Malayalam*.

The legitimate and prond child of *Rāmanāṭṭam* is *Kathakali*, which we shall now proceed to notice. As is usually the case, the play is generally announced by a *Kelikoṭṭu*, and since elaborate get-up and costume are necessary for the various characters, the more important actors get to the green-room early in the evening. As in the *Sanskrit* dramas, there is the *Pūrvaranga* which consists in the recital of a few verses followed by some specific *steppings* behind the curtain. After this the curtain is lifted and the hero and the heroine of the play

make their appearance and perform *Mungala*. This constitutes what is called *Tolayam-purappatu*, and it compares very favourably in almost all essential respects with the *Purvaranga* and the *Nāṇḍi* of the Sanskrit Dramas. After this is over the play begins, the most prominent feature of which is, as we have mentioned, the use of the gesture language and the exquisite dancing and acting to the accompaniment of the music of the singer who also works on musical instruments. The play generally continues throughout the night, the more important characters appearing only towards the latter part of the night. The actors are generally Nairs, and rarely Brahmins, and they have to undergo a process of training for a period of not less than five years. The various poses, the supple dances and the clearness of facial expression, in these *Kathakali* actors appear to satisfy the highest expectations of Bharata. They have attained almost perfection in the art of acting as expounded by Bharata, as well as in the art of the proper use of paints; yet they are not slavish imitators. Though Bharata has tabooed many an item from actual representation on the stage, such for instance as duels, deaths, feasts, kissing, embracing, etc., our actors never care for these restrictions: they represent these freely as on the modern stage.

The plot of the story is generally taken from that inexhaustible storehouse of Hindu mythology, the venerable Epics. It is to be regretted that no local heroes are dramatised, even though there were indeed a number of them, at that time at least, who achieved the highest eminence on account of the coming of the Portuguese and the consequent series of battles: yet our authors have introduced many innovations and changes in the Puranic stories which are intended either to remove practical difficulties of staging or to enhance the artistic effect of acting and afford scope for the presence of almost all the most important characters. The 'literary framework' of the plays is composed of three distinct elements. The *Pāḍams* or verses constitute the first of these and they are mainly Sanskrit in form and language, conforming more or less to the highly artificial nature of the classical language in the introduction of the various verbal figures such as assonance, alliteration and long compounds. But unlike those in Sanskrit dramas, these verses set the story in motion and serve as connecting links to bridge over the difficulty of time and space and in this respect they fulfil the function of the Shakespearian chorus as found in the *Henry V*. The verses are always sung and very seldom acted. The second is what are called *Daṇḍāśams*, long pieces of rhythmic prose in mixed Sanskrit and Malayalam which serve more or less the same purpose as the verses. The third is called *Paḍams*, which are mainly in Malayalam and form the subject for acting. They are neither in the classical metres nor in the musical Dravidian metres, but in rhythmic prose obeying certain specific laws, and guided by musical quantity and notation based on the length of syllables. They are at the same time conversational in style and use the 'emphasis of sound to strengthen the emphasis of sense'. The *Paḍams* can be divided into many kinds based upon the subject matter, such as for instance erotic pieces, challenges, self-praise, messages, laudations, etc. The first of these consists of such pieces as describe the sunset, moonrise, etc. and their effect on the impassioned hero or heroine, and these are characterised by the slow moving steps, which in

local technique are known by the term *Patīññāṭam*, the movement of the piece and the acting generally agreeing with the rise and development of the passion. The *Padams* are fully as capable of expressing emotion and as efficacious in imaginative appeal as the *Ālokas* but transcend them in musical effect. They are a splendid blending of music and poetry and thus, though they are to a certain extent lacking in naturalness, they are superior to the prose or 'loosened speeches' of the dramas. In spite of this want of a certain naturalness, they do serve their purpose almost to perfection. These three, namely *Padams*, *Dāṭakams* and *Padams*—constitute the literary framework of the *Kathakali*. An examination of some of the well-known plays clearly tends to show that there are separate rescensions of the text, and this agrees with the tradition that there were originally two kinds of *Kathakali*, the northern and southern variety, the one being popular in Northern districts of Malabar, and the other, in the South. This difference is not kept up now.

No account of this variety of our stage can be complete without a reference to the costume and get-up of the characters. When the entertainment was first devised and staged at the Gaṇapati shrine at Kottārakkara, the actors appeared in a very rudimentary costume. They did not apply paints, but instead wore masks painted over with red, dark and other pigments, and they never used any head-dress. The first change introduced in costume was by a prince of the *Veṭṭat* *Śrāvāṇam*: he insisted that the actors must use facial paint, wear a head-dress and cover their body with something like a coat. A few changes were also introduced in the musical accompaniments. Originally the musicians were themselves the actors, at which time the *Cenda* was not used. The introduction of this musical instrument and a singer over and above the actors constituted the innovations introduced in the matter of stage accessories. The mode of representation thus inaugurated has come to be known as the *Veṭṭat Mode*. These are, indeed, changes important in their own way. For, the first of these is a very important one, in that the use of masks not only precluded all attempts at varied expression, but, necessarily tended to stereotype the passions portrayed and prevented the rapid manifestation of the change of passion. The second set of changes, especially the introduction of a singer, enabled the actor to concentrate on the actual acting. For some time these were the only improvements effected, but later two *Nampūliris* took up this study and by them the whole show was completely reorganised into what obtains now. One of the *Nampūliris* belonged to the *Kapiṇṭaḥ Mana* and the other, to the *Kallatikotu Mana* and both introduced some innovations of their own. The innovations made by the former are briefly the following: different costumes for different casts of characters, *Ālavāṭam* and *Peṭṭamara* for the most important characters, in whom divine or regal splendour has to be emphasised; the mounting of a small ball on the tip of the nose of the *Asura* characters (See Pl. IV-i) and the application of *Cuttis* for enhancing the effect of facial expression, some changes in the code of the gesture language, the nature of the various *steppings*, the painting of the face and the use of *Niṇam Aniyal*. These constituted the main innovations, and all these changes together constitute what is technically called the *Koṭṭiṇṭaḥ* or the *Northern Mode* of representation. The *Kallatikotu* or the *Southern*

*Mode* differs from the former in that it introduced some changes in the gesture language and the dancing steps, in the nature of music, *Sangiti* a variety of tunes, being introduced, etc. The essential difference between the two lies in the fact that while the former emphasised expressiveness of facial features and gestures, the latter brought into greater prominence dancing and dancing steps and made them aid expression. In the stage at the present day, both these modes are mingled together and as a result all the four items are adequately emphasised.

We shall now briefly notice the costume and get-up of the various characters. There are three types of characters that appear on the stage and they are (1) *Minukku*, (2) *Teppu*, and (3) *Tāṭi*. The second of these is again of two kinds: (a) *Pacca* and (b) *Katti*, while the third is again of three kinds: (a) *Kari* or *Karatta Tāṭi*, (b) *Vella Tāṭi* or *Velutta Tāṭi* and (c) *Cokanna Tāṭi*, which last, be it noted, is almost the most important character in almost all plays.

The first of these, i.e., *Minukku* (See Plate IV-i: the figure to the right) which literally means smoothening the face, is the simplest of the kind and consists of a simple powdering of the face with yellow and red pigment mixed together, adorned here and there with a few white dots. Black unguent is applied to the eyes and the lashes, while the white of the eyes and the lips are reddened by the application of what is called '*Cuṇḍappūṇu*'. The forehead is sometimes adorned with a caste mark of the type called '*Gopi*'. This is generally the facial paint for the females, sages or saints and holy brahmins and minor characters.

*Pacca* is a slightly more elaborate form of facial paint. The facial front is painted in green, and it is given a white border about an inch in width running all round and touching the *Cuttiṇṇa* in the forehead, which forms the base of the head-dress. The eyes and lashes and lips are dyed as before. A typical instance of this could be seen in the seated figure in Plate IV-ii. This facial painting is generally given to the hero or the *Nāyaka* of the play and such other characters as are princes and good men.

*Katti* (See Plate V-i.) is a still more elaborate form of facial paint, being an improvement on *Pacca*, in that there is within the bordered *Pacca* another *cutti* around the nose, while the space between this and the nose is kept red, the nose being green in colour. The red streak will be over  $\frac{1}{2}$  an inch in thickness and runs up either side of the nose to the forehead and over the brows. In addition to this there will be placed just at the tip of the nose a round ball called *Cutti-purvu* which is white in colour. This figure generally presents a fierce character and is very impressive on the stage. This is the costume prescribed for *Pratīnāyaka* and those having an *Asura* tinge in their blood.

Still more elaborate and fierce looking is the costume prescribed for the characters, known as *Tāṭi*. *Tāṭi* style is of three kinds: (1) *Cokanna Tāṭi* or the red-beard; (2) *Velutta Tāṭi* or the white beard; and (3) the *Kari* or *Karatta Tāṭi* or the black beard, (see Plate V-ii the figure on the right). This differentiation is based on the colour of the beard worn by these characters which is an indispensable part of their costume. In this the *cutti* instead of circling round the nose and spreading out into

the fore-head runs around the eyes and reaches the *Cuttināta*, the ends of which together with the central part are adorned by *Cuṭṭipuvus*. The region of the eyes is painted with dark pigment. The other facial adornments are as before. A typical *Cokanna Tāṭi* is seen in Plate IV-i. This is the costume prescribed for proud and wicked characters who are bent upon doing evil things.

Such facial painting helps facial expression considerably, the colours of the paints and projections being devised with specific reference to the various *Rasas* and *Bhāvas* which predominate the various characters. *Kathakali* is eminently a play in which the stronger or wilder passions have full play. The exceeding simplicity of the female characters constitutes in itself an evident proof of the minor part they are intended to play in the actual conduct of the play. It is also significant that even the female characters (See Plate V-i and ii the second figure from the right), when they have to discharge sterner acts, do appear in a garb more or less worthy of their function. Similarly, when love is depicted, it is always the sensuous and impassioned or the wounded and disappointed type. Thus it is always the strong passions that find expression in *Kathakali* and the facial expression is such as will suit the strong, sensuous and intensified character of the passion; and naturally with a scientific eye for colour and effect, a variegated scheme has been introduced in facial paints, which agrees perfectly with the facial expression of the *Bhāvas*.

Quite consistent with the facial paint is the nature of the other items of costumes of which the most important are the head-dress, the breast-plate, the *Uttariyam* and the skirt. There are two types of head-dress which are technically known as *Keśabhāram kiritaṁ* and *Muṭi*. The first of these consists of a coronet surmounted by a circular disc. It is generally of two different types—a distinction based mainly on the size of the circular disc. The bigger one is generally used by confirmedly wicked characters (see Pl. IV-i the figure to the left) who are ferocious and have some sort of regal splendour, while the smaller kind is used by the other characters. Both these kinds of head-dress are used only by the male characters. The other variety of head-dress called *Muṭi* (See Plate IV-i the figure to the right) which corresponds to the coronet of hair of the sages and saints or the simple crown of kings, is generally worn by characters of a saintly disposition, sages and divine agents or allies, such as Hanuman, Nandikeśvara, etc. The head-dress worn by Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Śrī Rāma are generally *Muṭi* adorned, however, with peacock feathers, instead of a spherical crown. At the base of the head-dress is tied what is called the *Cuṭṭināṭa* (see Plate IV-ii seated figure: the white line above the eyes) which forms as it were, the base from which springs the crown or coronet and which forms the white border completing the facial tattooing described before. The ears are adorned with two ornaments: *Kuṇḍalams*, a convex circular wooden disc adorned with paints and hanging down, for the lower portion, and *cevikkuttu*, a concave elongated disc, for the upper portion of the ear. Both these are worn by *Pacca* and *Cuṭṭi* varieties of characters. The female characters and *Tāṭi* generally wear only *Kuṇḍala*, also called *Tūkkū*.

The dress for the body is simple, consisting mainly of what is called the *Koṭalāram*, the cover for the breast. It is a movable vest held in position by means of threads. The saintly characters generally have only garlands. Over this vest across the shoulders hang what are called *Uttariyams*, one of which must be red in colour held in position by means of a *Keṭṭūram* on the upper arm. There must be besides at least one more *Uttariyam* of white, but the actual number will depend upon the importance of the character. The forearm is generally adorned with a *Kaṭakam* and above that are worn some *Valas*, or bangles. The upper arm (See Plate IV-ii seated figure) will have besides the *Keṭṭūram* what may be termed a shoulder blade. In the case of the female characters, there will not be this shoulder blade nor the *Uttariyam*, while the *Koṭalāram* will have false breasts adorned with garlands made of glass beads, while the wrist is generally adorned by an ornate waistbelt.

The skirt, worn over drawers, is made of long pieces of cloth white in colour with borders adorned with lace work, (See Plate IV-i & ii). The pieces are over a foot in width and are strung closely, the whole being so arranged that while it forms a beautiful skirt, it gives absolute freedom of motion for the legs for acting and dancing. The two sides of the skirt are adorned with embroidered cloth (see Plate IV-i & ii) while in front hangs down what is termed a *Munti*. (See Plate IV-i the figure to the left). A leather strap, carrying belts, is tied on both the calf muscles, while at the ankles there is an ornate bandage as can be seen in Plate IV-ii.

Such, in brief, is the costume that the *Kathakali* actors use. In devising it, ample consideration appears to have been bestowed to suit the costume to the accompaniments and accessories of the stage, which it must be remarked is to a great extent primitive. The heavy costume no doubt makes the actors move with slow and measured gait, but it does not preclude the possibility of quick change in pose and position; and it is quite in keeping with the stately dignity of the conception and practice of this variety of our local vernacular entertainment—something which is as well echoed in the measured cadence and movement of the highly finished and literary nature of the language. It deserves also to be pointed out that this elaborate, though stereotyped, costume is quite in keeping with the Hindu ideas of symbolic representation. It may not be quite happy from the realistic point of view; but as symbolising the conception of superior characters and of the free and natural play of *Rasas* and *Bhavas*, it can scarcely be said to be second to any. The very sight of a character reveals, as much as, if not more than, his action, the natural springs of his character and the innate motives of his actions. If to reveal the innate quality of the character through costume can be a source of success from the point of view of artistic conception, then our dramatists have indeed attained to a high degree of success in this branch of art; for even the most austere critic must perforce admit that the costume of the *Kathakali* actor does reveal character.

Coming to the other accoutrements of the stage, reference deserves to be made only to the musical instruments. These consist of a *Ceṇḍa*, a *Cenkila* and *Etattūlam*. *Ceṇḍa*, the popular drum, is a wooden cylinder

with two ends open and covered up with leather pieces. *Cenkila* is a metal plate which is sounded in unison with the drum and these two and the *Elattālam*, which is a bigger variety of cymbal are sounded to provide time to the acting and stepping which are done to the vocal music. There is also a curtain used which is held in position, when wanted, by two men stationed there for the purpose. As for the stage, there is nothing except a temporary shed put up above the actors, while the audience have all to sit down in the open yard. The only source of light is the big brass lamp kept in front of the actor with wicks in all the four directions. As has already been mentioned, the play is always open to the public.

### (viii) Conclusion

We have in the preceding sections referred to the more important varieties of our secular theatre. Before we conclude reference may also be made to two other varieties, *Porattu-Kālī* and modern dramas.

The former of these, *Porattu-Kālī*, is a variety of our theatre which has found great popularity among the lower orders of Hindus. The general features of the stage are more or less similar to those of *Kathakālī*; but there is considerable difference in matters of costume and general acting. In these matters it more or less tends to the modern type of dramas. But it is also different from this in that it is characterised by a complete absence of refinements of any kind. It appears that *Porattu-Kālī* is a variety of entertainment introduced from the East Coast, and consequently it has never risen to the aesthetic, literary or dramatic position of *Kathakālī*.

Coming to the field of modern drama, it has to be confessed that we have not much to our credit. The extreme popularity of *Kathakālī*, *Tullal*, etc. probably stood in the way of the development of the modern type of dramas. This evidently is a later growth, probably not more than a generation old and it has had two distinct stages in its development. In the first period of growth, it was modelled upon the Tamil drama with plenty of music and scenic equipment with but little of real acting. This has had a short spell of existence. The spread of English education brought with it a knowledge of the modern stage and a development of that sort of literature, known as the Novel. When once the latter became popular, scenes from well-known novels began to be staged. Besides, a number of farces, portraying current social life, have been produced evidently for the purpose of the stage. Year after year farces are being produced, but so far they have had only an ephemeral existence. It appears more or less that in the field of modern drama our development lies in the direction of prose-drama. Amongst the novels that have lent themselves to the purposes of the stage, the most important are Mr. Candu Menon's *Indu Lekha*, our first and greatest social novel, Mr. C. V. R. Pillai's *Marthanda Varmā*, the great historical novel, and H. H. Rama Varma Appan Thampuran's *Bhātārāyar*, the greatest novel of the day.

Enough has now been said to show that Kerala has as much variety in the secular department of her theatre as she has in the religious department. Of these *Kathakālī* and *Tullal* are the most important both

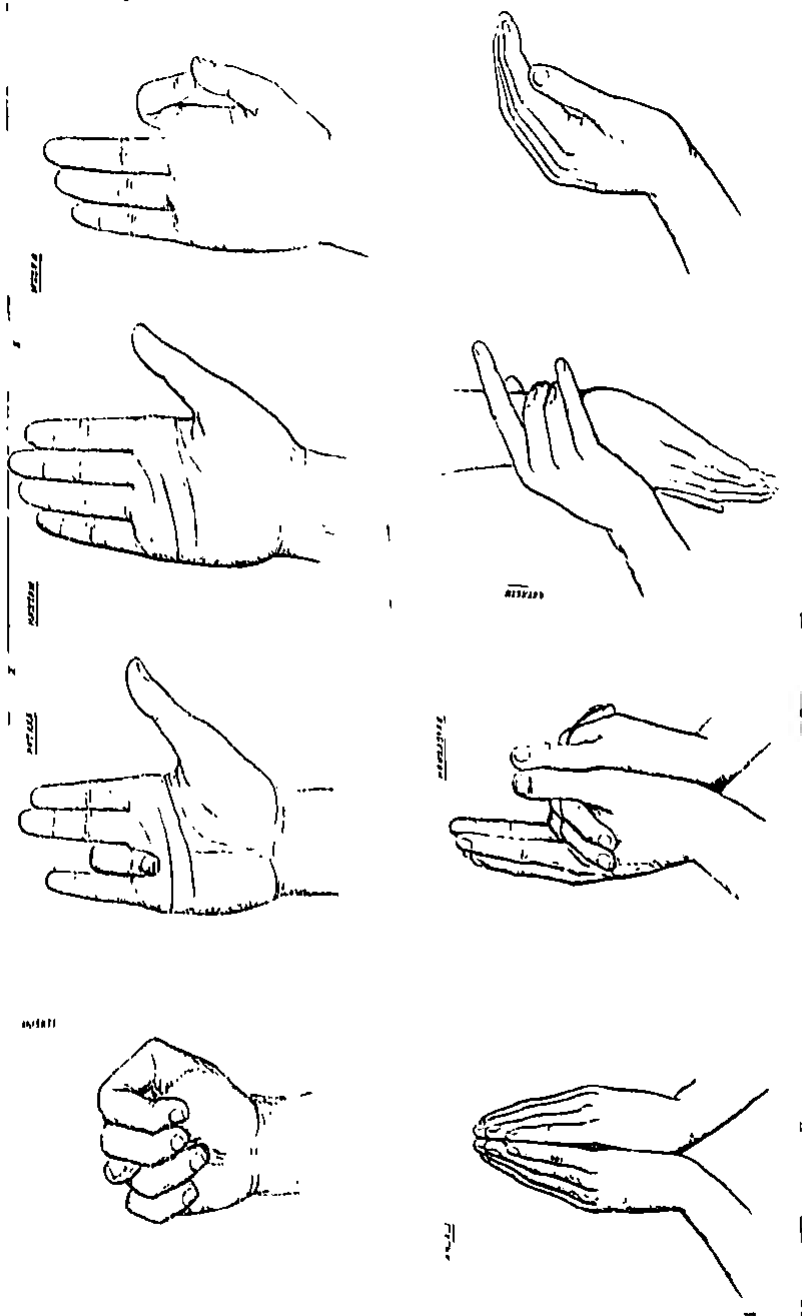


from the literary and dramatic points of view, and these are peculiarly Malayali in spirit, in conception and in practice. Both these again have their origin in a quarrel and that with semi-religious Sanskrit varieties: *Kathakali* is the off-shoot of a quarrel over *Kṛmāṭṭam*, and *Tullal* of a quarrel with *Cūkyār* acting a *Prabandham Kūttu*. And both have alike tended to the enrichment of our vernacular literature. To the student of dramaturgy, *Kathakali* has its own particular appeal to make and interest to yield. Apart from the code of gesture language it has evolved for its own purposes, herein may be seen almost the highest perfection of the arts of acting and dancing, the perfect realisation as yet known of the technique so scientifically elaborated and described by Bharata in his *Nāṭyā Sāstra*. And these two constitute our richest heritage in the field of our stage and literature.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The information presented here is mainly based on oral sources. Different local variations also might exist. Any suggestions will be thankfully received.





(Through the courtesy of the Superintendent of Archaeology, Trivandrum.)

(i) Prabandham Kuttu.

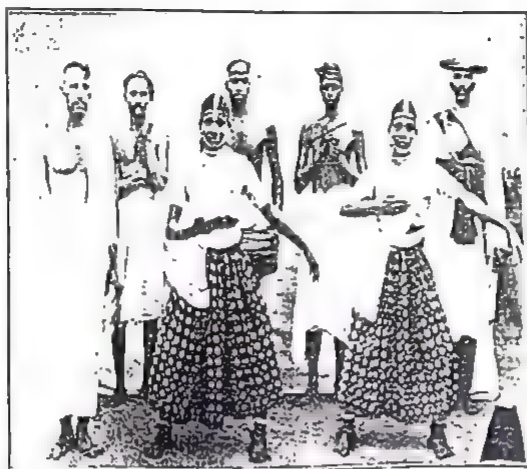


(ii) Tattal.



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(i) Korattiyāṭam.

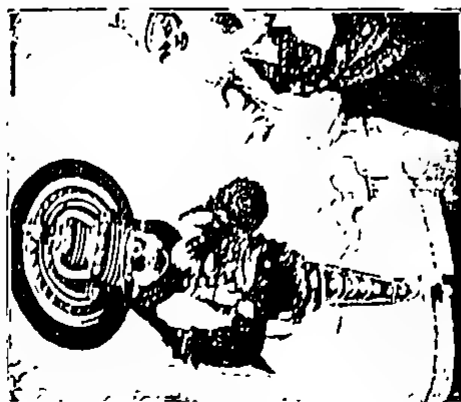


(ii) Kayyukoṭṭikāṭi.

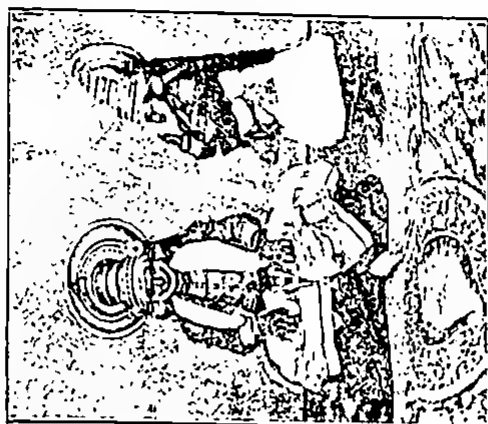


(Through the courtesy of The Honorary Superintendent, The State Museum Trichur.)

(i) Cokanda Lāp.



(ii) P.

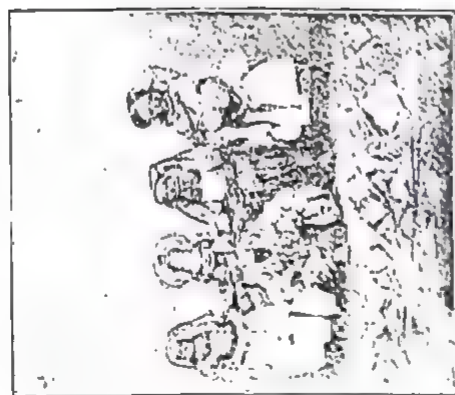


(Through the courtesy of the Sarvalhikar to His Highness the Maharaja of Cochin.)

(ii) Kari.



(i) Katti.



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# JOURNAL

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### Kerala Theatre

By

K. RAMA PISHAROTI  
(*Annamalai University*)

(Continued from p. 113, Vol. I, No. 1.)

#### V. SEMI-RELIGIOUS VARIETY.

No less important is the semi-religious variety of the Kerala Theatre which consists of the three important types (i) *Saṅghakkali*, (ii) *Kṛṣṇāṭṭam* and (iii) *Kūttu*. Each one of these is important in its own way. *Saṅghakkali* is an entertainment of a national character based on a religious function which might have had a political end, if our traditions may be believed; and it led to the development of some comic songs and the utilisation of satire as a weapon of social and political reform. *Kṛṣṇāṭṭam* may tend to shed some light on the origin and development of Hindu dramas, an aspect which is probably found developed in the *Yātras* of Bengal<sup>1</sup>; and it is very important in so far as it led to the creation of the type of entertainment,<sup>2</sup> called *Kathakkali* and with it the richest part of our vernacular literature. *Kūttu* is indeed the most important of the series, because it has a wider significance. For in this type the orthodox traditions of Hindu dramaturgy exist in their living form. Equally important is its contribution to the elucidation of the

1. Mr. G. Thakurtha questions this generally accepted view: vide the opening chapters of his *Bengalee Drama* for a full discussion of the relationship between *Yātra* and Samskrit Drama.

2. Vide the writer's paper on the Kerala Theatre, published in *Annamalai University Journal*, Vol. I, No. 1, pp. 105-106.

*Bhāsa Problem*.<sup>3</sup> These have been grouped together and termed the semi-religious variety for the reason that they have some religious atmosphere introduced into them, though it must be said, there is nothing essentially religious about them.

### (i) SAṄGHAKKAḶI.

The origin of *Saṅghakkaḷi* cannot be definitely ascertained, but if traditions may be believed, it consists of groups of *Saṅghas* meeting together for some national purpose, religious or secular, and amusing themselves by some spectacular entertainments. This type is known by a variety of names : *Saṅghakkaḷi*, *Śvastikaḷi*, *Śāstrakkaḷi*, and *Yātrakaḷi*. It is called *Saṅghakkaḷi* for the reason that various *Saṅghas* take part in the performance. The conduct of this *Kaḷi* as a vol.ve offering is supposed to bring prosperity, and so it is termed *Śvastikaḷi*. It is *Śāstrakkaḷi* because with this are traditionally associated the beginnings of *Śāstraic* studies in the land. It is *Yātrakaḷi*, or *procession-play*,<sup>4</sup> probably for the reason that this refers to the coming and going of some foreign elements.

The reported origin of this *Kaḷi* is as follows. The great advance that Buddhism made in the land made it necessary to devise some measures to check the rising tide of that alien religion. The orthodox *vaidiks* therefore met in solemn conclave and as advised by *Jaṅgamamaharṣi*, they inaugurated this performance and in addition invited from outside six great *Mīmāṃsa* scholars to combat Buddhism and to organise a school of *Śāstraic* studies.<sup>5</sup> If any credence may be attached to this legend, then the beginnings of this variety of entertainment may well be put back to the early centuries of the Christian era.<sup>6</sup>

An examination of the various names by which the entertainment is known, of the various traditions associated with it and of its actual conduct reveals certain general features which shed light on its origin and antiquity. First of all, this entertainment came into existence when Buddhism was in a flourishing condition in Kerala. Secondly, it must have been originated to check the rising tide of Buddhism, particularly

3. Vide the writer's papers : (i) *The Bhāsa Problem* in the *IIIQ*, Vol. I, pp. 103-11; 330-340; (ii) *The Bhāsa Theory Again—A Reply to Prof. Keith*, *IIIQ*, Vol. III, No. 3, pp. 552-558.

4. *The Bengalee Drama*, p. 8.

5. Vide the writer's paper, *Religion and Philosophy in Kerala*, *IIIQ*, Vol. IV, No. 4, pp. 712-14.

6. *Ibid.*, Note 5.

so if we may associate *Saṅghas*<sup>7</sup> originally with Buddhism. Thirdly it was an all-Kerala performance conducted for the purpose of achieving success in some great national enterprise. Fourthly with this is associated the coming in of foreigners into the land.<sup>8</sup> It is also clear that whatever its origin, this has been completely forgotten and it is very doubtful if the entertainment, as conducted at present, has anything to do with its original purpose. It seems that in this variety is preserved the shadow of what might once have been some grand national celebration of a victory in the field of religion or of politics; probably the former because of its religious associations. for it is even to-day held to be very auspicious to hold this performance. This further suggests its extreme antiquity, particularly because there is but very little of religion in it now.

The *Kaḷi* consists of five distinct sections: (i) *Keḷi*; (ii) *Nāḷupādam-vaikkal*; (iii) *Pāna*; (iv) *Āṅgyaṅgal*; and (v) *Hāsyāṅgal*, of which the second is supposed to be the most important part of the whole function. The entertainment is generally celebrated as a complement to some domestic ceremonies in the houses of well-to-do caste Hindu families. On invitation the representatives of the various *Saṅghas* come, and the first item of the programme consists in their sitting round a big wide-mouthed copper vessel, called *Cembu*, and singing songs keeping time by striking the vessel. This is followed by one of them becoming possessed and conducting a weird dance. The last item of the preliminary rite is to break a cocoanut, after which the man possessed becomes quieted down. This constitutes what is termed *Keḷikoṭṭu*<sup>9</sup> for this variety of entertainment. After this the party retires for their evening rites.

The next item of the programme is the *Nāḷupādam-vaikkal*, when a few brahmins of the party walk round a lighted lamp (See Pl. I Fig. 1), singing in accented tones a malayalam verse.<sup>10</sup> This function over, they

7. Tradition speaks of a number of *Saṅghas* existing in Kerala.

8. *Ibid.*, Note 5.

9. Cf. *Totayam* in *Kathākali*, vide AUJ, Vol. I, No. 1, pp. 106-107; also *Kriyā-cuvittuka* in *Kūttu* described later on.

10. It is a very interesting question to raise why the actors should sing a verse in Malayalam on the occasion of what is treated as a very orthodox ritual. Is there an element of satire on the Buddhists' use of the vernacular as the language of their religion? This cannot be, because such an aspect is inconsistent with any religious attitude. We may probably see in this the Buddhist influence in utilising the spoken language as a medium of religion and religious experience. If this view may be accepted, then we may see in this a close relationship between the *Keḷi* and Buddhism.

all retire for their dinner, singing boat-songs on their way, and in the dining hall they make a hell of noise, vociferating like hungry gluttons. After the repast they again assemble in the open hall outside and perform what is termed *Uḷiccal*. Then they begin their *Āṅgyaṅgal* which consists in sword play, which is not unworthy of Don Quixote. This is followed by *Hāsyāṅgal*, in which the chief character is *Iṭṭikaṇḍappan Kaimal*,<sup>11</sup> the impersonation of the master-idiot. In the first stage he figures as a swordsman and then as a fisherman and in both these capacities, he is made the butt of ridicule. Other characters also make their appearance, the more important being *Maṇṇan* and *Maṇṇatti*, the washerman and the washerwoman; still another is the gipsy who entertains the audience with her dance. This last part can be played only by the members of one family, the *Nāmpūtiri* family of *Pūntoṭṭam*.

Such in brief is the order and nature of this type of entertainment. It does not require any stage or any curtain; it generally takes place in the open air in the quadrangle of the house under a temporary canopy. The only source of light is the orthodox tall brass lamp, *nila-viḷakku*, (See Pl. I. Fig. i, the lamp in the centre) with wicks on all the four sides. The costume and songs are very primitive and the wit stereotyped. But the natural simplicity characteristic of the performance and the religious halo enveloping it account for the appeal it makes to the masses. The main interest of the whole thing lies in its antiquarian aspect and in its songs which are characterised by an archaic flavour. One impression it leaves upon us is that the performance consists of two distinct elements; one, a meeting of the leaders of the *Grāmams* for a religious or political purpose followed by their armed retinue and two, a farcical enactment by their followers to serve as a pastime for the masters.

## (ii) KṚṢṆĀṬṬAM.

*Kṛṣṇāṭṭam* is purely a Sanskrit entertainment, modelled probably upon the *Gītāgovinda*-acting and has the greatest halo of religious sanctity attached to it. As we have already mentioned, this type of play

11. This is a type of the local magnate we had in olden times and who is not very rare even in these days. Proud and haughty and conscious of his power and at the same time incapable of anything, he was in every way unworthy of the office he was called upon to fill by chance or the accident of heredity. He pretends to be brisk and clever and learned, but really he is just the opposite of what he pretends to be. He is an inimitable character drawn no doubt from actual life.

was originated by *Manaveda*,<sup>12</sup> Zamorin of Calicut, about the middle of the seventeenth century. The text of the play, *Kṛṣṇapadi*,<sup>13</sup> is written by the same prince, and it is a masterly imitation of Jayadeva's *Gītāgovinda*.

There are certain conditions attached to the conduct of the play. In the first place it is not all who can take part in the play : the players belong to certain specific Nayar families in the territory of the Zamorin of Calicut. Secondly, it is purely a family type of entertainment ; the play can never be enacted outside the limits of the kingdom and even there only in temples, royal courts, and the houses of aristocratic *Nampūtiris*. Another condition imposed upon the actors is that those who impersonate the more important characters must fast till the performance is over. The conditions laid down for its conduct, the antique nature of the costume and other accessories and acting—all these make the performance a very orthodox affair. In actual conduct it does not in any essential respect differ from its more popular offshoot, *Kathakali*. It is entirely pantomime acting and dancing where *ṛttam* takes the most important place, the gesture language used being almost the same as that used in *Kathakali*.

The actors are aided by music, both instrumental and vocal. There is the musician who sings and in accompaniment are sounded the musical instruments of *Maddalam*, *Elathālam* and *Cenkila*. As in *Kūttu*, the *Maṅgalācarana* consists of the *Kriyacavuttuka*<sup>14</sup> and the playing on the musical instruments. The whole performance is generally finished in nine days ; the play runs on for eight nights and on the ninth night is re-enacted the birth of *Kṛṣṇa*. Further, as has already been mention-

12. Vide writer's Introduction to the *Mukundamāla*, published as No. 1 of the Annamalai University Sanskrit Series, page v ; also his paper on The *Kṛṣṇas* of Kerala, contributed to the *Mm. Gangannatha Jha Commemoration Volume*. This prince is reported to be a contemporary and pious follower of Vīṭṭamangalam Swamīyar III, the head of Nṛṅguvil Madham and a great devotee of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. He requested the saint to get him a vision of the divine Lord. The latter invoked the Lord and requested Him to satisfy the desire of Mānaveda. Thus accordingly the Lord did ; but the prince in the madness of the divine moment wished to embrace the Lord and rushed at Him. This was not requested of Him, a divine voice said, and the vision disappeared, but not before Mānaveda was able to snatch a peacock feather from off the coronet of the Lord. This self-same feather, as traditions report, adorns the crown of Kṛṣṇa which the actor impersonating Kṛṣṇa wears. This is also assigned as one of the many reasons for the religious importance of this play.

13. The text has not yet been printed in Devanagari script.

14. See under *Kūttu*.

ed, the performance is restricted to specific times and places ; and as such cannot be acted to order. This variety of entertainment is performed as a votive offering, and the witnessing of the most important scene, *Kṛṣṇāvatara*, the birth of Kṛṣṇa, is supposed to give children to the childless on which occasion the pious for whose benefit the play is enacted go fasting the whole night till the performance is over. In this variety then we have an intensely religious play.

### (iii) KŪTTU<sup>15</sup>

Kerala is probably the only place in the whole of India where Sanskrit Dramas are staged in an orthodox fashion ; and the temple of the locality, where alone such staging is allowed, has been the most popular recreation-place for all high caste Hindus. The local stage has a long history behind it, going back to the days of the later Perumals, the imperial suzerains of Kerala. If tradition is to be believed, it reached the acme of perfection during the days of Kulaśekhara Perumal,<sup>16</sup> who was not only a great poet and dramatist but a past master in the art of histrionics. Aided by Tolan, his minister and favourite, many innovations were introduced in the stage practice to make the acting more realistic and the stage more popular. This tradition is more or less confirmed by the opening words of the *Vyaṅgya-vyākhyā*<sup>17</sup> wherein the imperial dramatist commanded its author to sit in judgment on the stage-merit of his drama which the king himself acted. When it is remembered that there is no other tradition of a stage reformation, it may readily be conceded that the Sanskrit stage in Kerala may justly be proud of its antiquity. The numerous restrictions imposed upon the actors and their acting and the various peculiarities in their get-up and their mode of representation make *Kūttu* an interesting subject of study to the student of antiquities. And this study deserves to be made as early as possible, for this type of play is dying out. Apart from the local importance of *Kūttu*, as being

15. The matter presented in the following section has, to some extent, found publication in the various articles the writer contributed to the Journal of the Mythic Society, Bangalore ; the Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, Branch, Bombay ; the Indian Historical Quarterly, Calcutta ; and the Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies, London.

16. Vide the writer's paper, *The Kulaśekhara of Kerala* published as an appendix to his edition of the *Mukundamāla* (AUSS, No. 1), where the date of the author is discussed ; see also his paper *The Bhāsa Theory Again—A Reply to Prof. Keith* IHQ, Vol. III, No. 3, pp. 555-57.

17. Vide Introduction to the *Tupatisaṁvāṇa*, published in the Trivandrum Sanskrit Series.



one of the most ancient and popular of our entertainments, it has got a wider Indian importance, for in this we have the Sanskrit dramas staged. It is distinct from the staging of the same elsewhere, if such a thing exists at all, in our having made the *Vidūṣaka* give by word of mouth a translation of the verses which the hero acts and in our dispensing with the curtain which is found mentioned in the extant dramas.

It is again distinct from the other local varieties in that two conditions have to be satisfied before it can be acted. The first of these is as regards the place of acting. Like the other local varieties of entertainment, or the dramas elsewhere, *Kūttu* cannot be staged anywhere and everywhere. It must be acted only in *Devālayams*, i.e., temples. In some of the richly endowed temples in Kerala there is set apart a beautiful structure, adorned with all the skill of the architect and the sculptor, for the purposes of acting; and this is known as *Kūttambalam*—Theatre-temple (See Pl. I Fig. ii.) which is described in the concluding section of the paper. In temples where such a separate structure does not exist, the acting is generally conducted in the spacious dining hall. In every case, the theatre is in front of the temple to the right and the stage faces the idol and the actors act in front of the idol; and *Kūttu* scrupulously satisfies the injunction that it must be represented only in *Devu-Sadas*; not even in *Brakma-Sadas*. As a matter of fact it is never found acted in any place other than a temple, and therefore only caste Hindus are allowed in. It is quite in keeping with this that every major temple in Kerala has endowed a particular *Cākyār* family, in return for which they are to stage Sanskrit Dramas annually or during temple festivals.

The second condition relates to the actors themselves. Whereas all caste Hindus are allowed to take part in the other entertainments, only a particular section of *Ambalavasis* is allowed to act *Kūttu*. They are *Cākyārs*, their women the *Naṅgyārs* and the *Naṅpiyars*. The *Naṅpiyars*' main concern in *Kūttu* is to work the *Miḷāvū* (See Pl. II Fig. i.) a close-necked metallic jar with its mouth tied up with a piece of leather to help the acting of the *Cākyār*. The *Naṅgyār* (See Pl. II Fig. i.) besides being an actress, has also to help the *Cākyār* by sounding the cymbal generally and in some cases by reciting in musical tones the Sanskrit verses which the latter acts.

The *Cākyārs*, the most important of those allowed to appear on the temple stage, are, it is said, the descendants of *Sūtas* who graced every ancient Hindu court as the court bard or the minstrel. The term itself is taken as suggestive of it, inasmuch as it is interpreted to be a corrupt

form of *Ślāgyar*, a man of respectability, a respect due to his wisdom and learning. Tradition hath it that a particular *sūta* with his family came over to Kerala with one of the *Perumals* as his courtier. When his family was about to become extinct, it was allowed to adopt into it the children of Brahmin women born of criminal intimacy. This procedure continues even to-day. Such children, if invested with the sacred thread, become *Cākyārs*; if not *Nāmpiyars*. The girls are taken into either section indifferently. Such is their traditional origin; and this shows that these actors have behind them at any rate a long histrionic tradition.

These two restrictions, as regards the place of acting and the person acting, show that whatever acting there was in ancient days, had for its aim, as in ancient Greece,<sup>18</sup> the popularization of religion and the language of this religion. Religion coloured the whole performance and hence its appeal to all classes of caste Hindus. This is again emphasised by the subject matter of the plays which is mainly taken from the venerable epics, the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata*, though naturally the actors have a partiality for the story of Rāma. Such a necessity could have taken place only in the early days of Aryan colonisation. Hence *Kūttu* came to have a religious character impressed upon it, a character which it retains to-day; for instance the *Cākyārs* are even to-day enjoined to fast till the performance is over.

In the early stages, this acting must have been modelled upon the old *Sūta*'s narrations, amplified probably with exposition and illustration, a form that is still living in *Prabandham Kūttu*, one of the three varieties of *Kūttu*. (See Pl. II Fig. ii.). The next step must have been regular dramas. In those days the works of Harṣa, and possibly of Kālidāsa, may have held the stage; for we find that the *Nāgānanda* has been a favourite piece with the *Cākyārs*. The next noticeable stage is when we come to the days of Tolan towards the close of the 8th century A.D. Religion and the institutions intended to further it had by his time taken root among the people and these no longer needed the active service of *Kūttu*. In the meanwhile social and political institutions had grown up and become more or less rigid. Abuses crept in and the wise and far seeing minister utilised this as a powerful weapon of social reform. The *Cākyārs* enjoyed absolute freedom of speech on the stage. Availing himself of this, Tolan introduced certain very effective changes. Personal references, pointed allusions, and innuendos were the weapons

put into the hands of the Cākyārs and these they used unsparingly, whether the victims were princes or nobles, patricians or plebians, when the good of the society necessitated an exposure of their conduct. Of course, the serious characters are never the mouthpiece of this satire, but only the inevitable *Vidūṣaka*. From the days of Tolan down to the present time, *Kūttu* has been serving not merely as a pleasant recreation but as an effective social tonic.

*Kūttu*, as suggested before, has three modes of entertainment, (i) *Prabandham Kūttu* (ii) *Naṅgyār Kūttu* and (iii) *Kūṭiyāṭṭam*. Of these, the first is pure narration with exposition; the second is pure acting, while only the last variety is a full fledged theatrical representation. In the first and the last of these, all the three, Cākyār, Naṅgyār and Naṁpiyar, have to be on the stage, while in the second variety the Cākyār's presence is not needed. As for the time of acting the first is acted in the afternoon, the second just after nightfall and the last one *Kūṭiyāṭṭam* is generally acted only during night except when the *Mahānāṭaka* is acted.

#### a. *Prabandham Kūttu*.

In this the Naṁpiyar plays on the *Mīḷāvu* (See Pl. II-Fig. i; also Pl. VI—ii) and the Naṅgyār sounds the cymbal in tune with the Cākyār's acting. (See Pl. II Fig. i). The Cākyār recites a verse from a *Prabandham*, generally that which deals with the story of Śrī Rāma, then he acts it; and afterwards he proceeds to expound it. The greatness of the actor in this case is to be measured not so much by his histrionic talents, as by his power of exposition which is often illuminated by apt and suitable analogies from current social, religious and political events of a praiseworthy or reprehensible character. It is here, as also in *Kūṭiyāṭṭam* that *Kūttu* discharges the function of a cathartic. The Cākyār here must be a sound scholar. The old generation of Cākyārs were great scholars, and, no wonder, even at the present day, their explanations, their interpretations and their appreciations hold good. Thanks to the work done by them, Kerala has always been a strong centre of literary studies.

#### b. *Naṅgyār Kūttu*.

In this variety of *Kūttu*, (See Pl. II Fig. i.) the Naṅgyār takes the place of Cākyār. The most interesting point in connection with this is that a woman appears on the stage. Here we have only pure acting and naturally this affords no scope for satire. The actress is helped by the instrumental music of the *Mīḷāvu* and the cymbal. Dressed in a queer way, she first recites a verse and afterwards acts in pantomime.

c. *Kūṭiyāṭṭam*.

The most important variety in the *Kūttu* family is *Kūṭiyāṭṭam* where we have Sanskrit dramas staged. The term itself is quite significant. It is composed of two words, *Kūṭi*, meaning combined and *āṭṭam*, meaning acting, and yields the idea, combined acting. It is mixed or combined either because both the *Cākyār* and the *Naṅgyār* appear on the stage to act, or because more characters than one appear on the stage, or because there is a mixture of narration and acting, or, again, as we are inclined to think, because of all these facts.

The first preliminary in *Kūṭiyāṭṭam* is what is known as *Kūttu-purappāṭu*, i.e., the starting of *Kūttu*. The stage is well adorned with green leaves, flowers, cocoanuts and plantains. A big lighted lamp, and a *Narapara*, a measure full of paddy are kept facing the actor. When the preliminaries are arranged and the actor is ready to appear on the stage, the instrumental music is sounded. On this occasion the usual music of *Miḷāvū* and cymbal is supplemented by *Madhaḷam*, *Kombu*, and *Kuḷal*. (See Pl. II Fig. ii). After sounding the *Miḷāvū*, the *Nāmpiyar* retires into the green-room and, bringing some holy water, sprinkles it upon the stage, reciting the *Nāndi-Śloka*, i.e. the benedictory verse of the drama more correctly of the act that is to be staged. This is known as *Araṅgu Talikkuka* (sprinkling the stage with water) and with this are over all the items of *Nāndi*.<sup>19</sup> Then the musical instruments are once again sounded, and after this enters the *Sūtradhāra*, or the stage-manager, of the play.

The *Sūtradhāra* enters the stage and treats us to a queer kind of stepping, accompanied by dancing, which is known as *Kriyācavuṭṭuka*.

19. Vide writer's Note on the *Nāndi*, BSOS, Vol. VI, No. 3, pp. 319-21. The reading given in the commentary, the extract of which was published there is perfectly legitimate and relevant, when *Nāndi* is understood as described here. It is not a mere recitation of a verse—it is doubtful if such a recitation forms part of it—but a very elaborate ceremony done for the most part within the green-room, at the close of which the *Sūtradhāra* comes upon the stage and recites the opening verse. It may be pointed out here that every act that the *Cākyār* stages has an introductory verse attached to it, which is to be recited at the close of the *Nāndi* ceremony, and this verse forms an announcement of the act that is to be staged. This would mean that the so-called *Nāndi* verses, in such of the dramas of the *Keralanāṭaka-cakra* which come under the now well-known but wrong category of *Bhāsanāṭakacakra* are but introductory verses to the first act and not the *Nāndi* verses of the whole drama. Cf. Writer's note on the subject in his translation of the *Dūta-ghatotkaca*, published in the *Shama'a* of Madras. This is a very important point particularly for Bhasites to ponder over.

stepping out the action. After this he recites to the accompaniment of music, some verses, dancing in a peculiar way all the while. This is followed by the *Sthāpana* of the play, or as we would put it, of the act. Even though the text of the drama may have a *Naṭi* taking part in it, she never makes her appearance on the stage. The *Sūtradhāra* does her part also.<sup>20</sup> This takes us to the end of the first day's acting.

On the second day the scene opens with the character that the *Sūtradhāra* has mentioned the previous day. This will generally be the hero of the play. But even now the play proper is not begun, for this actor acts only what forms the introduction to the particular act of the play which is to be staged. This is known as *Nirvacana* and this takes us to the end of the second day.

Here it may be pointed out that on no occasion is a drama staged in full, but only particular acts. The chief reason for this is probably the long period of time it may have to run and the practical difficulties of staging. A full description as to how the *Cākyār* must act the various dramas is given in the books, '*Kramadīpika*, and *Āṭṭa Prakaraṇa*, books which form the actor's manual and guide. Each *Cākyār* family has got copies of these books, but keeps them so jealously that they are not easily available.

20. Here again is another interesting point for Bhasites to ponder over. The curtailment of the character of the *Naṭi* is made no doubt as a measure of economy. And this could easily be done for it does not materially affect the play. When, however, this is done, the conversational character of the scene ceases: it becomes a mere monologue by the *Sūtradhāra*. Again, when the *Sthāpana* or *Prastāvana* is thus curtailed as a result of economising, it is but natural to expect the dropping out of such elements in it as have no immediate bearing upon the scene they are going to represent. Thus, the reference to the author, the history of the composition of the play and the occasion of its staging—these details could conveniently be omitted. Thirdly, since *Cākyārs* act only chosen acts at a time, they have to give an introduction on more or less the same lines for everyone of the acts they stage. Hence, we find a stereotyped variety of *Sthāpana*. Such a *Sthāpana*, therefore, does not point to Bhāsa's authorship of the particular act, but it simply means that it was an act popular on the Kerala stage. It may be pointed out that its main function, as it is now presented, is to announce the main incident of the act or mention the main character that appears on the stage. This then is the result of a living dramatic technique. Thus, as before, here also the nature of the *Sthāpana* does not point to any unity of authorship, much less to Bhasa's authorship, but only reveals the accepted stage practice of Kerala. If at all *Sthāpanas* do tell us anything it is only this—that those acts were very popular on the Kerala stage. This also should serve as an eyeopener to the Bhasites.

The *Nirvacana* being over on the second day, the main story begins on the third day in the case of those dramas which have no *Vidūṣaka*. In case, however, there is a *Vidūṣaka*, the main story has yet to wait for three or four days. For on the third day the *Vidūṣaka* comes on the stage and lords it over for the next three days at the least by the exposition of what are known as *Puruṣārthas*, or the aims of life. These are according to him, four in number : (i) *Vinoda*, i.e., the enjoyment of the pleasures of life ; (ii) *Vañcana* or deception, (iii) *Aśana* i.e., feasting ; and (iv) *Rājaseva*, i.e., service under kings. The exposition and acting of these take four days, but are generally done in three days by rolling up the first and the second varieties together. These four items teem with wit and humour. It is here that the offensive social customs and manners, the oppressive conduct and behaviour of those in power are exposed and held up to censure and ridicule. It is here, in short, that *Kūttu* appears as a powerful weapon of civic and social reform.

For the realisation of these *Puruṣārthas*, the people of the village of *Anadhīta-Maṅgala* i.e., the *Village of Illiteracy* assemble together under the leadership of the village priest, whose qualification for this post by the way is that neither he nor his father nor his father's father ever studied any *Mantra* or *Tantra* ! Of those assembled, the most important are the *Uṇṇi-Naṁpūṭiris*, the various types of *Ambalavāsis*, and the *Nāyar* element comprising the local magnates and the temple musicians. Here we have the unit of a Kerala Hindu village. There is, it must be remembered, only one actor on the stage and he has to act the assembling of this crowd, their deliberating as to what should be done to realise the aims of life, their bickerings and finally their coming to a decision. The *Cākyār* here figures as a perfect mimic. In impersonating this typical assemblage one by one, the actor takes the opportunity to ridicule their social and moral vices. In this case it goes without saying that the success of acting depends entirely on the actor's power of mimicry.

*Vinoda* is acted on the third day of *Kuṭiyāṭṭam*. The people of the *Village of Illiteracy* having assembled, they set about devising means as to how best they can satisfy their animal passion. This occasion is utilised to indulge in a lot of abuse on the immorality current in the society. The names of so many ladies are suggested one after another, but each one is given up for the reason that she has some failing or other. Here, then we have a process of elimination wherein are displayed all the failings that man and woman are together liable to. It need scarcely be said that this unsparing annual satire has been exerting a very salutary influence in keeping up the tone of social morality. The next item,

*Vaīcāna* is generally mixed up with *Vinoda*. The *Vidḍi*, fool, one amongst the villagers, is made the thief, and the occasion is utilized for much moralizing of a very valuable nature.

On the fourth day we have the third of the *Puruṣārthas* described and acted. Here no sort of curtailing is ever made or allowed to be made. The feast is described and the feasting is acted most realistically, the *Vidūṣaka* playing the role of an ideal glutton. Here we have mimicry in the purest and the most realistic form teeming with illustrations, brimful of humour, so much so that even a chronic dyspeptic will evince the keenest relish for a feast, if only he were to see this acting.

On the fifth day we have *Rājaseva*, the last of the *Puruṣārthas*, acted, when the ruling chief and his magnates come up for their share. The assembled villagers discuss among themselves as to who is the best king under whom they could take service. One suggests the chief of this place, another of that place. The various suggestions are over-ruled in favour of a particular chief. In this process of elimination the whole machinery of government has its weakness revealed. The *Cākyār* ventilates the grievances of the ruled. He describes in pitiful terms the hard lot of the people in general and of the subordinate officers. The numerous sufferings, physical and mental, which these have to endure consequent upon the carelessness, inconsiderateness and indifference of the masters are portrayed in but too vivid colours. Even the crowned and anointed chief is not exempt from the criticism of the *Cākyār*, and this is true even at the present day. His acts which are oppressive or obnoxious or unpopular are mercilessly exposed. His policy, when it is not conducive to the well-being of the people, is criticised downright. In short, the *Cākyār* brings home to the ruler how the people view him and his acts. And note this is done often and for the most part in the very presence of royalty, a presence which only makes the *Cākyār* more unsparingly eloquent. Such open unsparing criticism was, it need scarcely be said, very valuable in those pre-newspaper days in that it tended to improve both the ruler and the ruled. In this feature *Kūttu* fulfils the functions which the Miracle plays of mediæval Europe were performing. The three P's, the butt of the actors, in our case mean evidently men in authority, religious and secular.

After this long process of elimination, the leader comes to the conclusion that there is only one king on the face of the globe who is worthy of being served and that is none other than the hero of the drama they intend to stage, and the motley crowd of villagers start away to take service under him. Thus is this long introduction, perhaps not strictly

dramatic as some may be inclined to think, but none the less entertaining and instructive, connected with the drama to be staged.

On the sixth day of the *Kūṭiyāṭṭam*, the Cākyārs act the chosen scene of the chosen drama. All the characters appear on the stage, the male part being taken by Cākyārs, and the female part by Naṅgyārs. Even on this occasion the characters, except *Vidūṣaka*, never speak, but only use the gesture language which is greatly helped by the expressiveness of the eyes and the face. The actors come dressed in character, dressed indeed in a queer way. The mode of dressing is different in the case of the characters of different dramas. Thus for instance the characters of Jimūtavāhana, the hero of the *Nāgānanda*, and Arjuna, the main character in the *Dhananājaya*, and Śrī Rāma of the *Ramānāṭakas* appear in different costumes. The inevitable *Vidūṣaka* appears in his weird dress. The main function of this character is to recite for the benefit of the masses a vernacular translation of every verse that the hero acts. The part played by him in this respect is very significant, in as much as this marks a deviation in our mode of representing a Sanskrit drama, the more so because no provision is made for such a process in the dramas themselves. Here, then, we have an innovation introduced by a discerning critic to make the drama more popular. Tradition assigns this honour also to Tolan. This was also important in that in this we may see the first beginnings of *Maṇipravāḷam* which arose from the need for a hybrid language for the use of the *Vidūṣaka*, a language worthy of the character. This language is characterised by the preponderance of Sanskrit. Thus was begun for the use of the Sanskrit stage a type of language which in due course came to be looked upon as the norm of cultured Malayalam style.

According to the tradition of the Cākyārs the number of Acts in which they can train themselves, or are trained, is seventy-two, including the one act dramas and *Prahasanas*. Many of these are identified and they are the following.

1. *Subhadrā-Dhananājaya* ;
2. *Tapatī-saṁvarana* ;
3. *Nāgānanda* ;
4. *Mahānāṭaka* ;

The different acts of these four dramas, Nos. 1-4, have no special names, so far as we know.

5. *Mattavilāsa* ;
6. *Kalyāṇa-saugandhika* ;



7. *Madhyama-vyāyoga* ;
8. *Bhagavad-añjuka*.
9. *Śrī-Kṛṣṇa-dūta* or *Dūtavākya*;<sup>21</sup>
10. *Dūta-ghatōtkaca*;<sup>22</sup>
11. *Karṇa-bhāra* or *Karṇakavaca*;<sup>23</sup>
12. *Ūrubhaṅga*.<sup>24</sup>

Nos. 5—12 have only one act each, named as above.

13. *Pañcarātra*.

The names of two of the acts are available. They are: *Veṅṭāṅka* and *Bhīṣma-dūtāṅka*.

14. *Avimāraka*.<sup>25</sup>

The names of the first five acts have been obtained. They are (a) *Annōṭṭāṅka*, (b) *Dūtāṅka*, (c) *Abhisariyāṅka*, (d) *Parvāṅka* and (e) *Māṭamettāṅka*.

15. *Aścarya-cūḍamani*.

The following are the names of the acts; (a) *Parnaśālaka*, (b) *Śūrpaṇakāṅka*, (c) *Māyā-(Sītā)ṅka*, (d) *Jaṭāyuvadāṅka*, (e) *Aśoka-vanikāṅka*, and (f) *Angulīyāṅka*.

16. *Abhiṣeka-nāṭaka* :—

The names of three acts only are available and they are: (a) *Bālī-vudha*, (b) *Toraṇayudha*, and (c) *Māyāśīrasaṅka*.

17. *Pratimā-nāṭaka*<sup>26</sup> :—

The various names of the acts are: (a) *Vicchinābhiṣekaṅka*, (b) *Vilāpāṅka*, (c) *Pratimāṅka*, (d) *Aṭavyamaṅka*, (e) *Rāvaṇaṅka*, (f) *Bharataṅka*, and (g) *Abhiṣekaṅka*.

18. *Pratijñā-yaugandharāyana* :—

The acts are named as follows: (a) *Manirāṅka*, (b) *Mahasenāṅka*, and (c) *Ārāṭṭāṅka*.

21—27. The writer has published critical translations with notes of these dramas: 21—in the *People's Friend*, Trivandrum; 22—the *Shama'a*, Madras; 23 and 24—the *Maharaja's College Magazine*, Ernakulam; 25—the *Shama'a*, Madras; 26—the *Journal of the Mythic Society*, Bangalore.

19. *Svapna-vāśavadatta*<sup>27</sup> :—

The six acts are respectively known as : (a) *Brahmacaryāṅka*, (b) *Pantātṭāṅka*, (c) *Pūttuṭṭāṅka*, (d) *Śephalikāṅka*, (e) *Svapnāṅka*, and (f) *Citrāphalakāṅka*.

20. *Bālacarita* :—

One act of this is termed *Mallāṅka* ; the names of other acts are not available.

21. *Cārudatta* :—

According to a *Cākyār*, one of the acts of this drama is known as *Vasantasenāṅka*.

22. *Śrī-kṛṣṇa-carita*.23. *Umāda-vāśavadatta*.24. *Śākuntala*.

These twenty-four dramas are connected with our stage. They may be broadly classed under three heads : (a) those that are popular even to-day, (b) those that were once popular, and (c) those that are only traditionally reported to be popular. Under the first head may be included the first eight. Under the head (c) come the last three dramas mentioned above, and of these, two are yet unknown, while the last was put on boards only once. Under the head (b) may be put down all the rest of the dramas in the above list.

The two dramas, *Dhanāñjaya* and *Tapati-saṁvarāṇa*, are the productions of Kulaśekhara, one of the Perumals of Kerala, who appears to have lived in the middle of the 8th century A.D. They were written for the Kerala stage by a Kerala Prince. They have also a commentary written by the author's courtier from the actor's point of view. These commentaries are, therefore, very important documents for the students of the Kerala stage, though Dr. Mm. T. G. Sastri of Trivandrum did not think fit to publish them.

The *Nāgānanda* has been, and is still, a very popular drama on our stage, a popularity which may to a great extent be explained by the fact that Kerala was the last stronghold of Buddhism and Jainism in India. This drama has taxed the actors' and the stage-managers' in-

27. The Journal of the Mythic Society, Bangalore.

genuity to the last limit. Tradition says that even the fourth act used to be realistically staged, the actor impersonating *Garuḍa* actually flying through air! The last successful flight was made at Irinjālakuda, when the actor actually rose out of the temple stage and flew through air and safely perched himself on the top of a hill about one and a half mile to the north of the temple. The hill is even now known as *Kuttu-parampu*. About two centuries ago an attempt at flight was made under the patronage of the then Maharaja of Cochin at his headquarters at Kurikad, a village four miles away from Tripunittura. But it ended unsuccessfully, for the actor who manipulated the cords—I don't know the exact significance of the word—failed in his work and consequently the actor came to grief. Since then the attempt has not been repeated. It will form a valuable addition to our knowledge, if complete directions regarding the flying can be got. The second act of the drama, containing the suicide scene, is being acted even now. A fairly long piece of cloth is twisted round with a noose made at one end and the other end is fixed to the ceiling. The character inserts her neck in the noose—women alone are allowed to impersonate this character—and rushes down in a giddy whirl about five feet. From their point of view this is no doubt an achievement.

The *Mahā-nāṭaka* is traditionally looked upon not as an original *Nāṭaka* but as one compiled from various dramas. The one peculiarity connected with it is that it is the only drama that is acted during day-time.

The *Bhagavadajjuka* is a little *Prahasana* which has once been very popular on our stage. It has an elaborate commentary detailing how to stage it. The text proper does not contain the name of the author, but the colophon in one of the manuscripts in the Paliyam Mss. Library assigns it to Bodhayana. This and the *Mattavilāsa* constitute the two farces popular on our stage.

The *Kalyāṇa-saughandhika* is a popular drama: with this drama is connected the famous *ajagaranṭtam*. It affords excellent scope for acting and is the work probably of a *Cākyār*.

Amongst the five one-act dramas, the most popular is the *Dūta-rākya* or *Śrīkṛṣṇadūta*, as it is called. The other dramas of the series also must have been staged, because extracts from them are found in a manuscript which contains all the scenes to be acted in a particular temple in Travancore. The *Pañcarātra* and the *Arimāraka* might have been popular stage plays, but now they are not commonly staged, even though they afford ample scope for *Cākyārs* to act.

The *Aścaryacūḍāmaṇi*, the *Abhiṣeka-nāṭaka* and the *Pratimā-nāṭaka*—these three constitute the twenty-one acts depicting the life of Śrī Rāma. They have been always very popular, though at the present time they act only a few select scenes. These three dramas are known among Cākyārs as *Cerīya-abhiṣeka*, *Valīya-abhiṣeka* and *Pādukābhiṣeka*. Of the next three dramas, at least one act of one of them, the *Mallāṅka* of the *Bālacarita* has been popular. Regarding the *Cārulatta*, no information is yet available as regards its ever having been popular on our stage. The *Śrīkṛṣṇacarita* remains yet to be discovered, if it may not be identified with the *Bālacarita*.

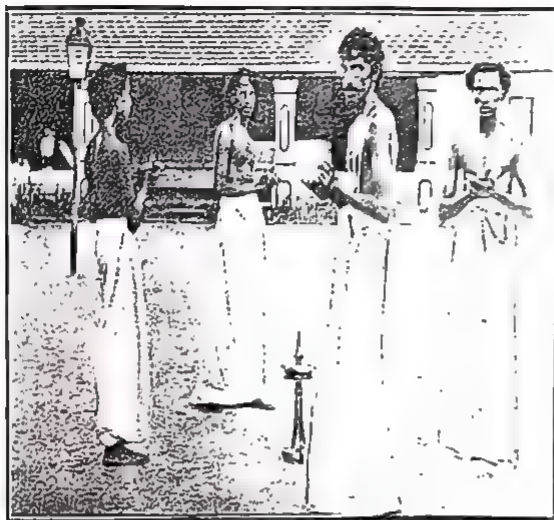
The *Umāda-vāsavadatta*, which is a work of *Saktibhadra*, the author of the *Cūḍāmaṇi*, might have been a popular stage play, but it is yet to be discovered. The *Sākuntala*, tradition says, was once put on the stage, but when the Cākyār acted the opening scene, he spoiled his eyes when he looked at two objects in opposite directions, as the scene required. After this experience, it has not been staged.

Enough now has been said to show that many dramas have been popular on our stage, the total number of acts prepared for the stage being seventy-two according to the oral testimony of a Cākyār. If this be true, some dramas yet remain to be discovered.

Taking *Kūttu* as a whole, we have here in a limited way dance and music, narration and exposition, imitation, representation and pantomime acting. There is enough difference in the mode of acting the different varieties of this family and the sympathetic audience has enough food for enjoyment, both intellectual and aesthetic. Not only that, it has done much for educating our society and for raising the standard of our literary culture. No doubt *Kūttu* is steadily declining in popularity and a detailed study of the same deserves to be made because of its intrinsic worth and because of its dramatic and historical importance. And even now it is not too late. The so-called modern refinements of the stage have not begun to exert their influence on *Kūttu*. It still continues in its antique mode of representation. The mode of dressing, the mode of acting and the mode of staging—in short the stage technique—has remained the same, probably since the days of Tolan, i.e., probably a little over a millennium.

Mention has been made in the preceding section to *Kūttambalam*—Theatre-temples, where *Kūttu* is staged—and we shall not better conclude than with a reference to these interesting structures. In the Cochin State two such structures exist, one at Irīñjalakuda and the other

Fig. i.



*(Through the courtesy of the Superintendent,  
the State Museum, Trichur.)*

Fig. ii.

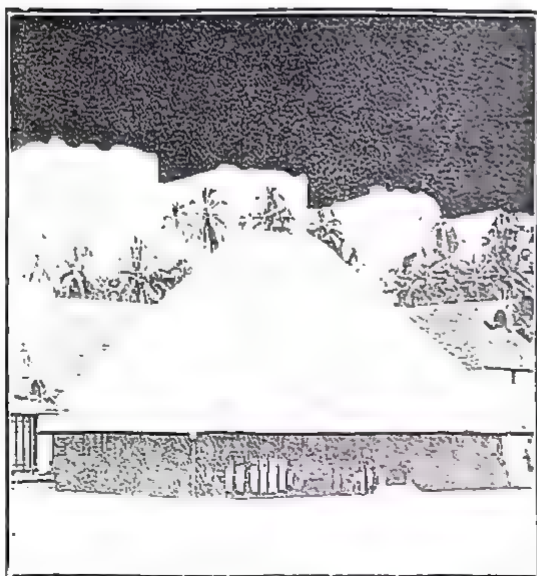


Fig. i.

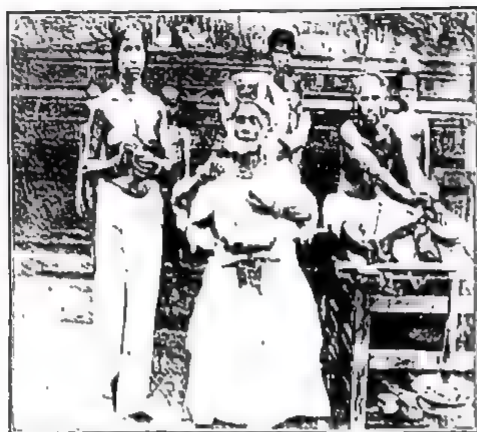


Fig. ii.



(Through the courtesy of the Hony. Superintendent,  
the State Museum, Trichur.)

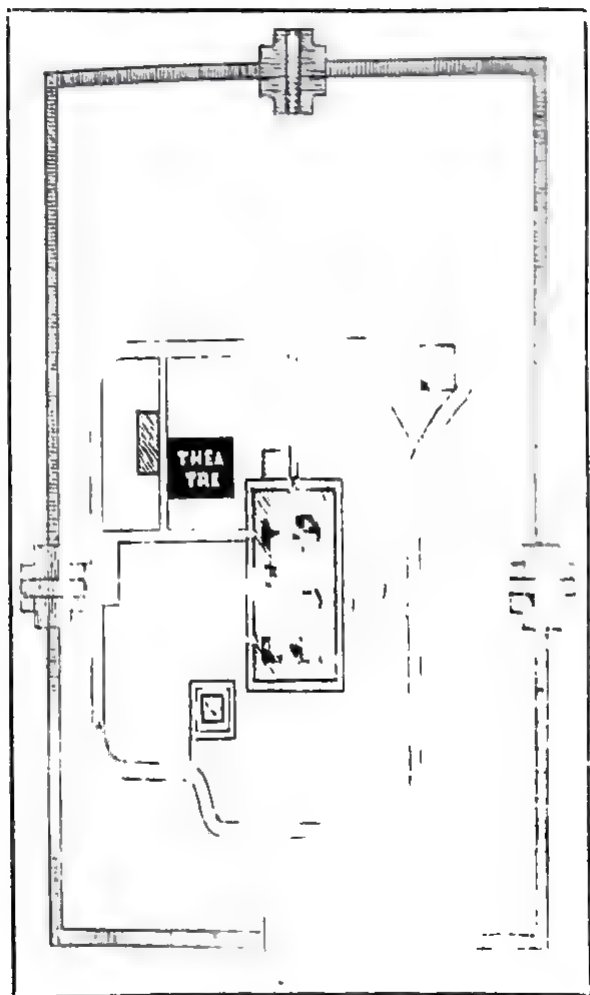


PLATE IV.

Fig. i.

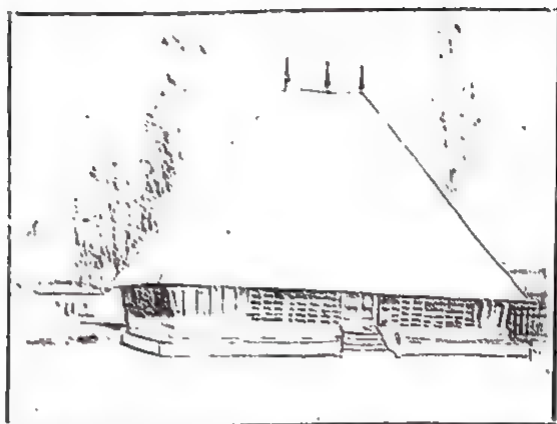


Fig. ii.

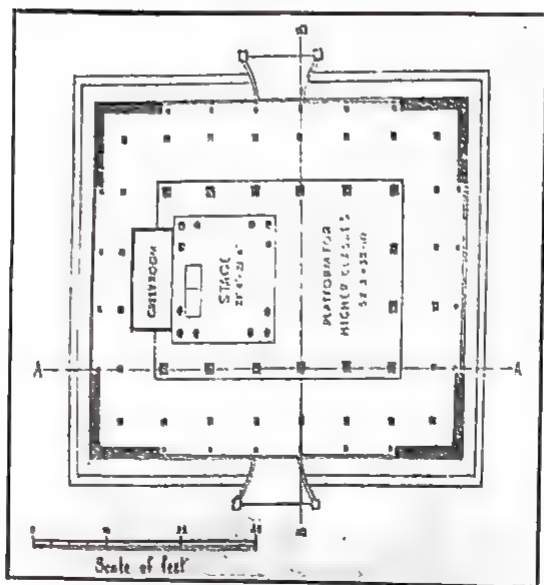




Fig. i.

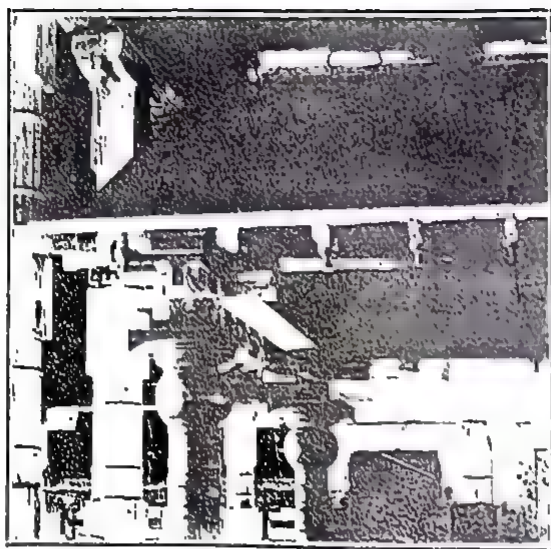


Fig. ii.

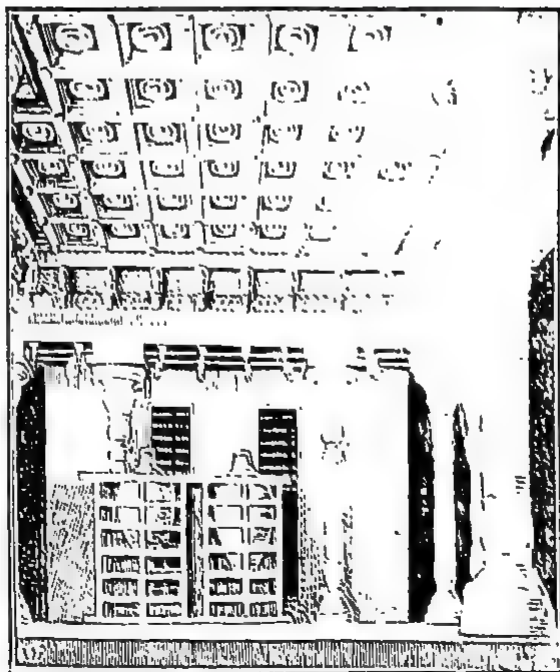


Fig. i.

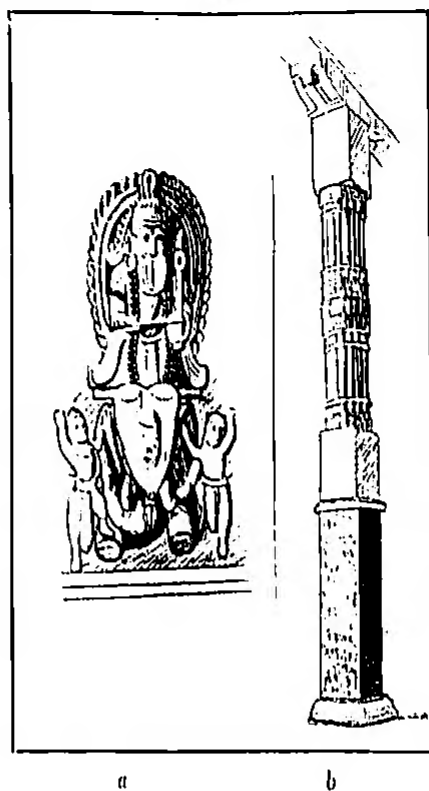


Fig. ii.



Fig. I.

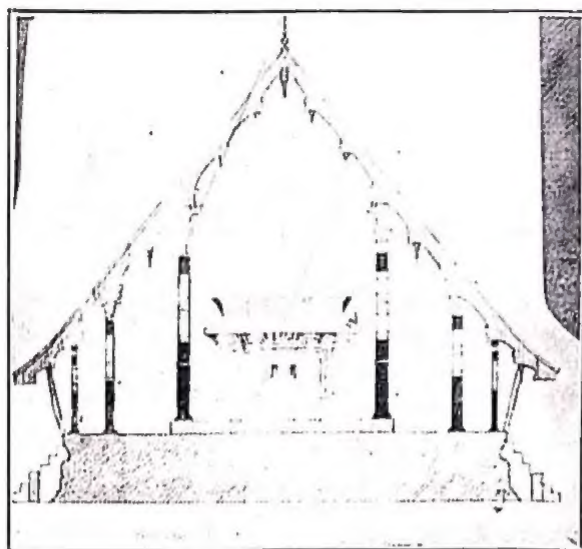
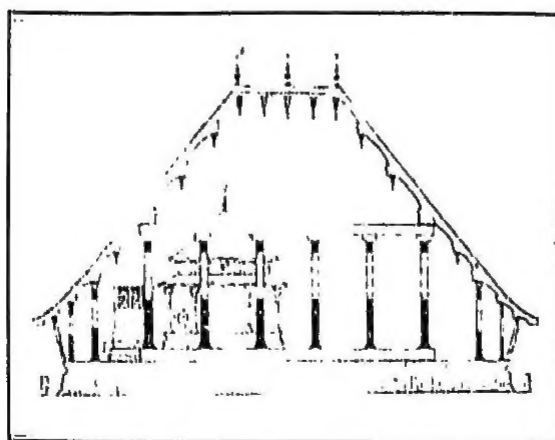


Fig. II.





at Trichur. They are by no means ancient structures. In structural details and in appearance they are alike. A general view of the former can be had from Plate I. Fig. ii, and of the latter from Plate IV. Fig. i.

The theatre-temple at Trichur is situate to the north-west of the sanctum sanctorum (See Pl. III.) and lies east and west with two main entrances one north and the other south (See Pl. IV. Fig. ii.) The basement stands about four feet above the level of the ground and is worked in granite with all the detail-ornamentation of the *adhishthāna* in the orthodox fashion. The superstructure is made of wooden rails (See Pl. IV. Fig. i.) Entering the theatre from the south one finds a raised platform in the centre of the structure running east and west divided into three distinct parts (See Pl. IV. Fig. ii.), the central portion being higher than the one on the east or west. The western-most part constitutes the green-room which is marked off from the rest by screen walls. It has two divisions, one reserved for males and the other for females. The eastern part is the auditorium, where the Brahmin aristocracy seats itself. The central portion which is slightly higher than the auditorium forms the stage proper. It is a square area with an ornate ceiling (See Pl. V. Fig. ii.) supported by ornamented pillars. (See Pl. VI Fig. ib). Notice the exquisite wood-carving on the ceiling (See Pl. V. Figs. i and ii)—the figure of Narada (See Pl. VI. Fig. ia). From the green-room are two entrances into the stage and between them is located the musical instruments (See Pl. VI Fig. ii). All around this central flat, there are pillars to support the roofing, the nature of which will be clear from Plate IV. Fig. ii, while the section views of the same will be clear from Plate VII. The roof is copper-sheeted and adorned by three golden domes (See Pl. IV. Fig. i.) The whole forms an imposing structure. It is a general rule that the theatre should be in front of the temple to its right (See Pl. III), so that the actors will be facing idol when they act.

This takes us to the end of our present study of the Kerala Theatre. I have in the course of the paper surveyed sixteen varieties of representations popularly current in Kerala. I may not have exhausted the varieties and types; my descriptions have been meagre and scrappy and this could not be otherwise, for the information on the subject has to be collected from strolling bands of actors. However, enough, I believe, has been said to show that here is a little known but wide field for research which promises to elucidate some aspects of our ancient culture.

23. I am greatly obliged to my friend, Mr. K. Narayana Pisharoti, B.A., an artist of great promise, for the pen and ink sketches of the theatre and its various parts which are published here, as plates III to VII. Similarly, I also express my obligation to Mr. Subramaniam for photographing them.